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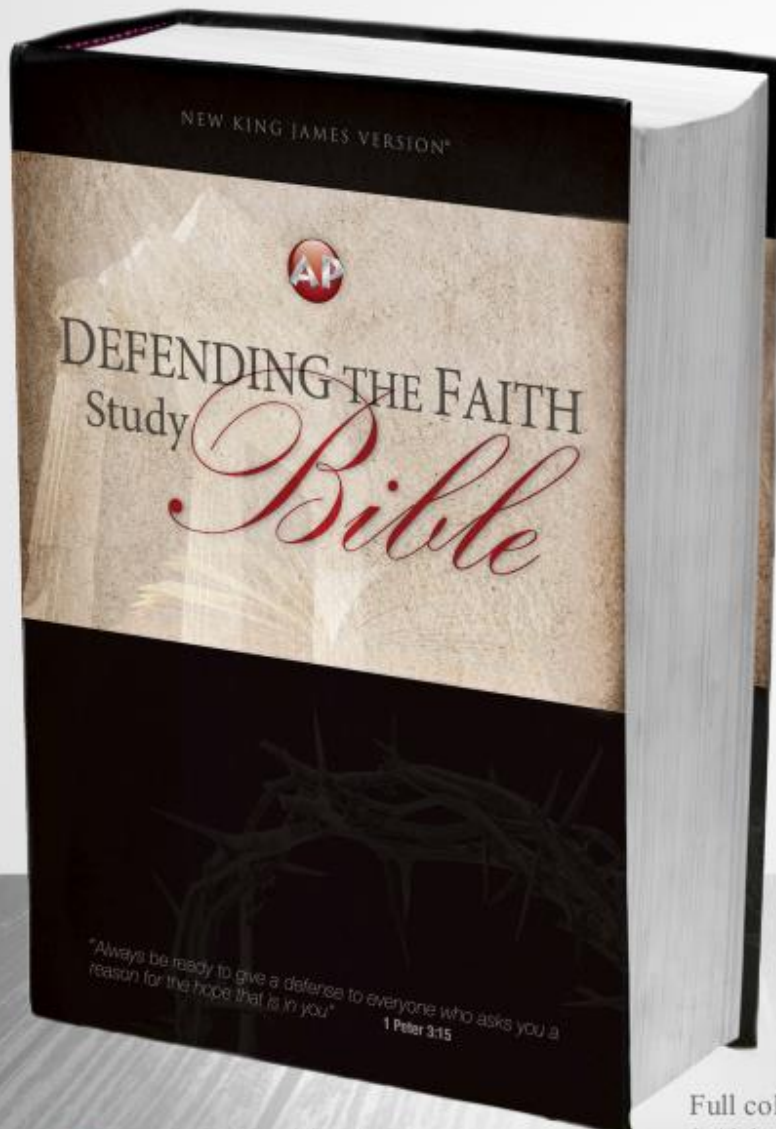
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Old Things, New Writers, and we're Late...

The last several weeks have been busy, to say the least. Our family went to Roundhouse and had a great, refreshing time with brethren and friends. The Bible Bowl was based on Daniel, Nahum, and Habakkuk—and three of the top four scores (including the overall champion) belonged to my daughters. I was also fortunate enough to be part of the lectureship at the Harrah (OK) church of Christ (two other writers for the *Quarterly* spoke on previous days, and another is the local preacher in Harrah). It was a wonderful experience!

But enough with my veiled excuses for this issue being late!

Our first two non-editorial articles are different, in that they are written by two men who are doing missionary efforts—one in the US, and the other on the other side of the world—and who are in need of support. Please check out the editorial for more information on why we decided to include these two articles/requests.

We are excited to have another new contributor to the *Quarterly* in this issue. Kevin Barham is a lawyer who excitedly preaches when he is given the opportunity, and he encourages us to consider our salvation in light of not only *God's* love, but *man's* love as well.

If you're into history, Richard Mansel deals with the destruction of Nineveh, while Dewayne Bryant gives the interesting story of the Dead Sea Scrolls. If you want to be convicted and brought face-to-face with how you spend your time, check out Gerald Cowan's article, "If the Next One was to be Your Last One..." Michael Shank sheds light on the Conversion of Saul, and Travis Anderson focuses some of his attention on the man that helped Saul, Ananias.

And I would be remiss if I didn't also point you to the article by William Howard (who doesn't want you to be confused by thinking he is somehow related to Bill Howard, another regular writer for *The Quarterly*). In it, he powerfully shows that there is *never* a time when Satan puts you in an inescapable box of sin.

And if you *really* want to re-think something you thought you knew—that you thought *everyone* knew—then read Gantt Carter's article on "Remove This Cup."

We've also got book reviews, a collection of quotes, the next in the Tabernacle Shadows series, and several other articles that we hope you'll enjoy—or at least find interesting.

The articles contained in each issue represent the research and conclusions of the authors, and may not reflect the views of the other authors (or even the editor). But they are presented for contemplation by Christians who are dedicated to living for the one true God of heaven

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(AKA: The Contents of the Quarterly)

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Glorifying God through Forgiveness

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

In September of 2018, a Christian man sat on his couch, eating ice cream and watching television. He was a dedicated member of the kingdom of God, who enjoyed leading singing and discussing the sermons at the Dallas West church of Christ with his father. But that evening, an off-duty, white police officer—one who had a history of making racist comments—came into his apartment and shot him. There was outrage from the black community, and cries of police violence and racism came to life once again. After reading about what happened, and what came to light in the trial, I have to think that race definitely figured into what happened.

But the part that, to me, was far worse than a black man being killed, is that a faithful, active Christian was murdered—one who, according to all who knew him, was a happy, vibrant servant of God who tried to bring other people to the Lord. I admit, I deeply wanted justice to be served on the one who killed one of God's servants. On October 2nd of this year, the killer was found guilty of murdering Botham Jean.

But what happened next shocked everyone.

Brandt Jean, Botham's teenage brother and also a Christian, looked at the person who shot his brother, and said, "I forgive you." He urged her to pray and seek God.

This act polarized many. One man I work with said that Brandt's actions were wrong and unjustifiable (though he admitted he was conflicted because he admired him for being willing to forgive). But for others, this act was an amazing show of love—the love that God has for us. Ted Cruz called it a demonstration of true "Christian love." The Dallas D.A. called it "an amazing act of healing... I would hope that the greater community, not just Dallas, not just Texas, but the greater United States, could gain a message from that."

Botham and Brandt's father, Bertram, said it this way: "I have no hatred for her..." Then, when asked why they were able to forgive her, he said: "...that's what Christ would want us to do. You know, go back into biblical times. That's what we learned. If you will not forgive, neither will your father forgive you. I don't want to see her rot in hell. I don't want to see her rot in prison. I hope this will help her to change..." [CNN transcript, 10/3/2019]

In this radical act of forgiveness, Brandt and Bertram Jean showed the world—at least for a moment—the love of God in action. They glorified God through forgiveness.

Truly Forgiving is Glorifying God

Struggling to breathe, His life draining from Him as the blood drops fall from His many wounds, Jesus said words that seemed to go unnoticed by all but those who were closest by: "Father forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). When Jesus said this, unlike some of His

other sayings on the cross, we are given no reaction of the people, the soldiers, the thieves—nobody, it seems, heard Jesus utter these words outside of whatever witness passed the information on to Luke (see Luke 1:1-3).

The mere fact that He's even *considering* forgiveness for these awful sinners is unthinkable! Jesus, they falsely accused you! ("Father, forgive them.") Jesus, they beat you to within an inch of your life! ("Father, forgive them.") Jesus, they mocked you! ("Father, forgive them.") Jesus, they spit in your face! ("Father, forgive them.") Jesus, they impaled your hands and feet with nails! ("Father, forgive them.") Jesus, they lifted you up on a cross...to die. ("Father, forgive them.")

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)

God wants to forgive people—that is His desire, His will, His longing. "God wills [desires] that no person should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He displayed that love, that kindness, that grace, that mercy in sending His Son, Jesus, to die so that we can live eternally.

For God loved the world this much: that He sent His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life (John 3:16).

When we do what God wants us to do—in the way that God wants it done (in the right heart, motive, and action)—we glorify God. We say through this loving obedience, "God, your ways are higher than our ways. You are the Almighty. We submit ourselves to your benevolent leadership."

Ask a Christian to join in praising God in song? Done. Ask him to listen to the sermon? Easy. Ask him to generally be a decent person? Sure, no problem. Ask him to forgive like Jesus? Um...

It's easy to glorify God in the action things. Singing, praying, reading Scripture, taking the Lord's Supper. But when you've been hurt, when you've been emotionally beaten or scarred, when you've had your heart broken, your trust violated, when you feel the weight of all the injustice that someone can pile on you... YOU WANT TO EXPLODE AT THEM! You want to fight back, to make them hurt, to make them feel the same pain—if not worse—that they've inflicted on you. Your deepest pain cries out for vengeance.

And far too many times, you give in. *We* give in. You let your words fly with reckless abandon. Your voice ratchets up louder and louder as you give voice to your anger. You make threats and hurl accusations at the speed of sin. And God never enters your mind.

Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels—He had that power—to deliver Him from the cross and the crowd. He could have, with His mere words, sent each of those wicked men straight to hell and played it live on a big-screen TV for the world to see what happens to those who oppose Him.

But He didn't.

Why? Because God is glorified, not when we seek vengeance, but *when we forgive*.

When we put God's desires above our own, we glorify Him. When we love Him enough to let His word be our guide, we glorify Him. When we do not demand "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth," we glorify Him.

Forgiveness Allows Us to Glorify God

I remember a time of real stress in my life. In all honesty, it was either the second or third-most stressful period of time in my entire life. I was hurt. I was angry. I wanted vengeance.

Sure, I covered it up with the "Christian" virtue of bottling it all up inside so that no one could see it (to the best of my ability). I didn't act on it, but I fumed. I imagined all kinds of evil against the source of my stress. And brethren, I'll admit this to you, I prayed to God three times for a funeral to take place, and *soon!*

Do you think, amidst that stress, I could truly glorify God? Maybe. Jesus glorified God in the garden when He was in great stress. Do you think, though, that with my inner fuming, my deep-seated anger, my mental murder of someone else, that I could truly glorify God? You know the answer—*NO WAY, JOSE!*

If you don't forgive, you *cannot* glorify God! "God forgives, but I don't" ain't gonna get you into heaven. You know there's been times when you've held grudges, when there's something you just can't let go, when you won't rest until someone has paid—maybe you're there right now, and the thought of

what someone has done to you just eats at you, causes you to lose sleep, takes away precious time and brain power from things that would make you happy, peaceful, closer to God. You need to know that God isn't happy with this. He isn't pleased with that attitude. And you shouldn't be either!

Scripture is very clear on this:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (1 John 4:20).

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire (Matthew 5:21-22).

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:43-45).

In other words, you can't glorify God when you hold on to anger, to hate, to that attitude that destroys you from within. One person said it this way: "Holding a grudge is like drinking rat poison and hoping it kills off the other person." These things keep you from focusing on God, from praising God, from worshipping God, from glorifying God.

Instead, forgive!

If you refuse to forgive, you're taking a swan dive off a steep cliff straight into the pits of hell. "Yeah, I'll send my soul to the lake of fire. That'll show them!"

God forgave you. Jesus forgave you. Now you forgive others. There are so many verses that speak to just how important this is, but I'll just read you one, and tell you where to find a couple others.

if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you don't forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15).

Even more powerful is the parable Jesus gives in Matthew 18:21-34—and the conclusion He gives in verse 35 is this: God will do this to you too (send you to the tormenters forever) if you do not forgive **from the heart** the ones who sin against you. Not lip-service forgiveness (for that doesn't glorify God—Matthew 15:8), but **from the heart** forgiveness—that is what allows us to truly glorify God.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Forgiveness Causes Others to Glorify God

People see you; they watch you. You may think that you've got everything hidden, but you're not as good as you think at hiding it. When you sin, they see it. They notice it. They register it in their brains.

When you forgive, they see it. They notice it. And their minds are BLOWN.

A man cheats on his wife, and word gets out about it. He is ashamed and asks for forgiveness, promising to change. But all of her friends tell her, "Don't believe him," "Once a cheater, always a cheater," "You'd be better off without him," "You can do better than that pile of trash," "You deserve a better man." They fill her mind with nothing but justice, vengeance, and punishment. But instead of following their (perhaps) well-intentioned advice (after all, they are just wanting to spare their friend more hurt), this woman makes the difficult decision to forgive her husband, to work through the hurt, and to seek healing. And after several months of praying, working, and showing God's love through forgiveness, they emerge from the ashes stronger than ever before.

Her friends, and all who know about it, marvel at the change that has taken place in their marriage—all because she took a chance and was willing to forgive. And many of them are forced to admit that it was thanks to God that she had the strength to go through with it. Forced admit it was thanks to God that they made it through the struggle. Forced to admit that God's urging of forgiveness brought about one of the strongest marriages they had ever seen. That is, they *glorified* God—gave Him the credit for the *power*, the *motivation*, and the *results* of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is powerful, people! Anyone can hold a grudge, be angry, or strike back. That's easy. But forgiving is hard, and *when people see it they take notice!* And it isn't something we should try to hide.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

I don't remember the details of exactly where and when, but some Christians in a predominantly Muslim country were in an airport, and when security realized they were followers of Jesus, they took their belongings and beat them and bloodied them, punching and kicking them as they curled up into a ball for protection. When the guards finally tired of that, they dumped the Christians' bags out on the ground and laughed. The Christians slowly crawled around and picked up their belongings, putting them back into their bags. As they stood up and began to walk towards their gate, they stopped and looked at the guards, and one of them spoke up: "I love you, I forgive you, and I will pray for your health and your heart."

Most of the guards laughed, but one of them was truly stunned. He contemplated those crazy words—*they must be out of their minds*, he'd try to convince himself. He remembered the look in their eyes—a look, not of fear or of defiance, but of compassion, caring, and concern.

He couldn't get it out of his head. "I love you, I forgive you, and I will pray for your health and your heart."

Two weeks later, the same Christians entered the airport again. When they approached the security area, a couple guards decided to rough them up. But before they could, the other guard—the one who couldn't stop thinking about what they said—stopped them, and said, "Leave them alone. They're my friends." He escorted them personally towards their plane, and through tears, asked to know more about Jesus. He was soon baptized, and converted his family to the Lord.

This man, because he had been forgiven, glorified God in what those two Christians did, but also went further and turned his life into one that glorifies the Creator of the universe.

So Why Forgive?

We could go with the quick and easy, open-and-shut answer, and simply say, "Because God says to do it or you'll burn in hell." Which is 100% true. But if that's the only reason we do it, we are truly shallow, shallow, shallow people.

We forgive because God knows best. It's amazing that over and over again, we discover that when we obey God, our lives are...better! Choose ye this day whom ye will serve: stress, anxiety, anger, hurt, resentment, revenge, and hatred—or God. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord and forgive. Do you want stress or peace? Hate or happiness? Choose true from-the-heart forgiveness, and a profound peace that surpasses all understanding is there for you.

We forgive because it helps us. Yes, forgiveness is better for our blood pressure, our headaches, our ulcers, our mood swings—and our eternal souls. Forgiveness brings about reconciliation between enemies, between husbands and wives (who sometimes view each other as enemies), between family, between brethren. It removes animosity, it removes stress, it removes heartache, and replaces it with joy and happiness and excitement for what the future has in store!

We forgive because it brings glory to God. We glorify God by putting Him first, even when it's hard. When we submit to His commands (which are not grievous—1 John 5:3), we glorify Him. Our forgiveness pictures the forgiveness that God gave to us. So when we forgive, we are acting like God, we are imitating God, we are trying to be like our heavenly Father who loves us!

We forgive because it can help bring others to Jesus. Forgiveness is one method of evangelism that we should practice daily. When someone cuts you off in traffic, don't scream and shake your fist at them, wave your hand at them and mouth, "Don't worry about it, no problem," with a sincere smile. When your boss yells at you, don't yell back or storm out of the room, but nod and say, "Thanks for the feedback. I know that must really be aggravating for you to deal with. I'll see what I can do." When you're having a moment of not-so-kind fellowship (i.e. arguing) with your spouse, don't escalate it by raising your voice, but remember that "a soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1), and pray for him/her instead.



ISLAND TREATS: MISSIONARIES IN MICRONESIA

Joey Treat

I'm sitting in the floor in the airport, the plane is delayed, my wife and 9-year-old son have gone to find a snack and bottles of water. The other two are teenagers, a daughter and another son. They are sitting in the floor next to me. We are on our way back to our corner of the world, Micronesia. It has become our home after living there for fifteen years.



(Nina and Noah Treat, sitting in the airport)

We are eager to get back to our normal way of life. We have been in the United States reporting on the mission work for the last three months. Although good to see family, enjoy some familiar foods and feel cool weather again, it is time to go home. There's no place like home.



We now live on Guam but didn't when we started in the area. Saipan, an island to the north of

Guam in Micronesia, was where we lived the first five years. When the church there was able to stand on its own, we moved to Palau. Being a second-world country, we had concerns over continuing to raise our children there. Guam is now the third Micronesian island we've lived on, having moved there in February of 2019.

From Saipan and Palau, I have always made trips to Chuuk, an island in the Federated States of Micronesia. Chuuk is in a third-world country. The people are poor, there are not enough jobs, and many of the people live off the land. Drinking is a daily pastime for many of the Chuukese and the island suffers for it. More than once I've seen a drunk man standing in the middle of the road with a machete daring any cars to try and pass him. Our Chuukese brothers are experts at approaching such men and getting permission to pass by. A foreigner like me would have no chance alone.

People often make the mistake of thinking those in third-world countries are easy to convert. They will show interest – if they think someone has money. Truly converting them is challenging, though. They have to be thoroughly convinced, for example, that Jesus built only one church. They have to be persuaded that their eternal destiny depends on truly following God. They have to be shown a life in God is worth the sacrifices it will cost.

Getting past the money barrier can take time. When they first see an American, many think, "If I become a friend to this guy I'll surely get some money." We try to let them down easy as we reveal that money is not what they'll get from us. We work to build interest in spiritual things so they can have something better than money. When they realize money is not going to be available, many leave. The interest of some stays however, and they go on to become Christians and lights for God in the world. "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you..." Acts 3:6.

The goal is to make disciples. We spend a lot of time with those being baptized before and after they go under the water. We want to be sure they are truly converted. It has happened many times—when the decision to get into Christ is too easy, often the decision to get out of Christ is easy, as well. It's better if they spend more time studying the Bible before being baptized. It's better if they

have time to ask questions. It's better if they fully count the cost of being a Christian. That's what Jesus said in Luke 14:25-33.

When we get back we'll seek conversations with people. Working spiritual things into those conversations gives us a springboard to invite to worship or to a Bible study. Then, as members are added to the church and the numbers go up, we'll try to help those members grow in faith. We'll provide tracts and books for them to read, we'll encourage them to worship faithfully, and when they struggle with anything, we'll be there to show our love and support.

We'll learn what they are struggling with by sitting and talking with them. Every time they struggle we have an opportunity. We can demonstrate Christianity and help them, or we can let the op-



portunity fail by doing little. One man is the primary caretaker for his aging mother. He strives to keep a positive outlook, but it's discouraging for him to watch her deteriorate physically and mentally. He takes care of her 24 hours a day. Our opportunity with him is to build him up and strengthen him. We can help by visiting him and talking about Scriptures that encourage him. The Lord rewards those who are faithful, and he is repaying his parents, being a good example of 1 Timothy 5:4 in action. We can spend time with him and her so he has other people to talk to. We can sit with her for a time and let him have a much-needed break. And, also, we can pray for him and her and let him know we are doing so.

All of the members have needs. Those who are in their 20's and those who are in their 30's. Those in their 40's, and those in their 50's – they all have needs. My wife is my helper as we assess those needs. The older we get the more we see.

One of those needs is to grow in faith. We can help by teaching solid Bible lessons regularly.

God's intention that we feast on the word doesn't happen if the preacher fails to present Biblical lessons. What the members will one day teach, they must learn first. Every Sunday and Wednesday we have the opportunity and responsibility to present encouraging teachings from God's word, so the members get the food they need.



After five weeks in Guam, I'll go to the country of Palau for a week and do the same things. Then five more weeks in Guam and I'll head to Chuuk. The cultures are different, but the needs are the same. Listen, Love, Serve. Sitting and talking is

listening, having a desire to help is loving, and doing what we can for them is serving. It is the recipe for success in working with those outside the church and those inside.

Isn't that what God does with us? When we pray, He listens. He constantly loves. When He answers our prayers, He serves. Then Jesus says, concerning His teachings, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Editor's Note: Joey and Tammy Treat (whom we have known personally for close to a decade) are good, faithful Christians who work with six congregations across Guam, Palau, and Chuuk, none of which have elders or deacons. They need support at this time as the cost of living has risen sharply. They are overseen by the DeGaulle Drive Church of Christ in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Facebook Page: Island Treats.

Contact Joey at jntreat@yahoo.com.

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* AN OPPORTUNITY IN VERMONT *

Jason Floyd

[Editor's Note: We have known Jason and Sarah Floyd for several years, and can attest that they are both devoted Christians with sincere care and desire to spread the gospel in Vermont, where they live. Please read this letter and prayerfully consider what you might be able to do to encourage them, and possibly assist them in this effort.]



Greetings from the Lord's church in Bennington, Vermont!

We are in the midst of a spiritual crisis up here in New England, and we need your help! Vermont is the most "unchurched" state in the nation, with nearly half of its population being religiously unaffiliated. This secular attitude is destroying families and leaving communities morally bankrupt and vulnerable to addiction. The statistics on churches of Christ in Vermont are even more discouraging; we only have 10 congregations in the entire state, with a membership of only a little over 400. Of those 400 members, probably less than 300 are actively serving in a local congregation.

We are asking you to help us bring the Bennington area to salvation in Christ. A congregation

of about 25-30 wonderful members already exists here in Bennington. We own our own building (free from debt), and we meet every Sunday for worship and every Tuesday for mid-week Bible study. We have two hard-working elders. Instead of having a preacher, the men of the congregation have shared the teaching and preaching responsibilities for approximately 30 years. We try to hold frequent area-wide church events and community outreach activities. However, we have several challenges facing us. Many of our members, including one of our elders, are struggling with health issues that threaten their mobility and transportation, making outreach planning and execution extremely difficult. In addition, although our congregation previously shared maintenance responsibilities as well, we are now forced to

spend a large portion of our tiny budget on hiring workers for building upkeep, lawn care, and snow removal, because there simply are not any members with the health or time to fulfill these tasks. We also cannot maintain a strong bond of fellowship with other New England Christians as easily since most members are unable to attend out-of-town church events; the congregations being at least an hour or more apart.

The elders and members of the Bennington church of Christ have requested me to begin serving as a preacher and servant here in order to alleviate some of these difficulties. My wife Sarah and I moved to the Bennington area in early 2013 and have been worshiping with the church here since that time. We now have two children, Nathan (5) and Noah (2), and we love our church family very much. I already preach often, lead singing, and organize events, but I am excited at the prospect of serving in an increased capacity. The elders and I have agreed on a plan. I will reduce my hours at my current job (as a contract weather observer at the Albany [NY] airport) so that I will only be working two days a week. (My family has a small side business as well that we will also continue, but it only takes up about two days per month of my time.) This change will enable me to spend far more time serving the Lord's church here in Bennington and throughout the Northeast, especially since my current schedule has required me to work night shifts every weekend.

Some of my planned work will include the following:

- Fulfill the obligations of a minister laid out in 2 Timothy 4:2
- Community outreach through Bible studies and benevolence
- Being a "point man" or contact person for evangelistic efforts and other events
- Establish a food pantry for needy members and the community
- Attend to my children so that Sarah can participate in and lead ladies events and assist our own ladies in any needs they have
- Save the church money by performing building maintenance, cutting grass, and

removing snow (a huge expense up here, where it often snows six months out of the year)

- Transporting members to and from worship services as well as to church events, which are often 1-2 hours away
- Organizing youth events to encourage the small number of teens we have in our congregation and to bring in more young people
- Practice frequent hospitality

With these plans, I would experience a significant drop in income each week and would also incur major additional expenses. I am seeking financial support of at least \$2,000 a month to continue paying my own bills, to purchase a used minivan to transport members as well as my family, to attend brotherhood events such as singings and lectureships, and to practice hospitality. I understand that this sum is almost certainly too large of a burden for one congregation to take on, so I'm asking for any monthly amount that you or your congregation might be able to provide. Every small addition to my monthly support further enables me to serve.

Whether or not you are able to provide any financial support, we ask that your congregation, especially the elders, prays fervently for this effort, and that we will have the wisdom and patience to continue in this great work. Thank you for your dedication to the Lord's kingdom, and we look forward to your support for our continued labor in the mission field of Vermont.

In Christian love,

Jason, Sarah, Nathan, & Noah Floyd

731-879-6747 (Jason's cell)

Jason_floyd32@yahoo.com


1138 Shaftsbury Hollow Rd.

North Bennington, VT 05257

If you have any further questions that you prefer our elders to answer, I have included their contact information below.

Bob Pilot: 802-345-4233

Ken Nicholson: 802-753-7663

The background of the top half of the page is a close-up photograph of several fragments of ancient papyrus scrolls. The scrolls are yellowed with age and feature handwritten text in dark ink, likely Hebrew or Aramaic. The fragments are irregular in shape, with some showing clear lines of text and others being more torn and fragmented.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Dewayne Bryant, Ph.D.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have an undeniable mystique. Discovered in 1947, these 2,000-year-old documents include the oldest copies of the Hebrew Bible. Scholars marveled at the original publications of the first scrolls. They generated incredible excitement in the 1940s and 1950s which reverberates today among scholars and non-specialists alike.

This discovery included nearly a thousand documents, dating from 250 BC–AD 68. Two hundred thirty compositions represent all of the books of the Hebrew Bible except Esther (the male-dominated Qumran community likely had little interest in a book featuring a female hero, although it may have been included in the library but was not preserved). Of the remaining 700 documents, about 100 remain unidentified because they are too fragmentary. Another 250 represent texts common to Judaism at the time. Three hundred fifty are sectarian documents belonging to the community at Qumran, which seem to have been most closely related to the Essenes.

The Fascinating Story of the Scrolls

Whether the Qumran scrolls are a source of controversy or confidence depends upon a person's point of view. Regardless, they have an aura

of mystery for several reasons. First, we still have many questions about the identity of the original owners and why they hid the scrolls. Scholars generally agree on two points: (1) these texts comprised the library of the inhabitants at Qumran, and (2) the owners hid them before the advancing Roman army c. AD 68 and intended to retrieve them once the threat had passed. The precise identity of these individuals is a subject of debate, although many believe them to have been Essenes.

Second, the story of the scrolls' accidental discovery is both fascinating and contradictory. Discovered by several young Bedouin shepherds in 1946 or 1947, the first manuscripts found their way into the hands of a Bethlehem cobbler and antiquities dealer named Kando for a tiny fraction of their worth. More scrolls appeared, and some of them found their way into the hands of scholars through clandestine channels. The stories of the discovery and acquisition of the scrolls do not always agree.

Third, many of the compositions contained enigmatic material. Some refer to mysterious figures with names such as the Teacher of Righteousness, the Wicked Priest, and the Man of the Lie. One of the works, known as the Copper Scroll, appears to

be a treasure map leading to sixty-four sites containing a significant fortune. So far, no one has managed to decipher its inscrutable directions to these treasures.

Fourth, the discovery was an unexpected one. Other libraries from Mesopotamia contain many thousands of texts because they appeared on durable clay tablets. Scholars have discovered numerous papyri in Egypt due to its arid climate, which plays a crucial role in the preservation of these manuscripts. However, Israel's climate is wet enough that papyrus discoveries have been extremely rare. Israel and other surrounding cultures have had very little literature survive that was not copied down from one generation to the next.

the originality of Jesus:

*Ever since the Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered, one single, all-pervasive question has haunted the imagination, generating excitement, anxiety, and, perhaps, dread. Might these texts, issuing from so close to 'the source', and (unlike the New Testament) never having been edited or tampered with, shed some significant new light on the origins of Christianity, on the so-called 'early Church' in Jerusalem and perhaps on Jesus himself? Might they contain something compromising, something that challenges, possibly even refutes, established traditions?*¹



Thanks to the dry climate in the area of the Dead Sea, the scrolls survived.

The Great Isaiah Scroll

The Dead Sea Scrolls: The Greatest Story Ever Sold?

Part of the mystique of the Dead Sea Scrolls involves the suspicion that they might challenge Christianity or compromise its uniqueness. For example, in their book *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, authors Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh—the same authors responsible for *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, upon which Dan Brown based much of his novel *The Da Vinci Code*—argue that these documents have the potential to undermine

The idea that the Qumran texts might contain teachings that would undermine Christianity is a fringe theory without any real substance—except in the minds of conspiracy theorists. Typically, such writers highlight the slowness of the scroll's publication, the involvement of the Jordanian government, and the inclusion of a large number of Roman Catholic scholars (thus implying some form of control or manipulation from the Vatican). While there were some scandals involving the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, they were far less sensational than the ones skeptics might imagine.

¹ Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*: (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1991), 130.

The delay in publication involved several things, including the daunting task of having to photograph and record the many thousands of fragments discovered; the bulk of the workload being given to a small group of scholars; difficulty in securing funding for the project, and territoriality of some of the scholars selected for translating and studying the scrolls. Although the extreme slowness at which the translations finally appeared was a scandal of sorts, it would hardly make for a good conspiracy story.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical Accuracy

Why so much interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls? While they make a significant contribution to the study of the biblical text, so do many other discoveries. The Nuzi and Mari archives contain information that aids in the understanding of the world in which the biblical patriarchs lived. The Amarna letters give us a window into the world and politics of the ancient Near East in the 14th century BC, around the time of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt. The fantastic library at Ugarit contained literature dating to the 13th-12th centuries BC, which reveals numerous parallels with Israelite practices and shed light on the biblical authors' references to pagan beliefs.

Unlike other collections and ancient compositions, the Dead Sea Scrolls hold a special place in biblical studies. Before the discovery at Qumran, critics could claim that no one could ever know what the original text of the Hebrew Bible contained. With the earliest available copies of the Old Testament dating to the Medieval Period, this criticism had merit. No one could have known just how many editorial changes might have appeared over the many centuries between the date of composition and the earliest extant manuscripts.

With the scroll's discovery, scholars now had documents that predated the oldest surviving copies by about a thousand years. By comparing the two, experts could see how accurately scribes had copied these texts. While some scribal variations existed (likely due to simple errors), the accuracy of the Jewish copyists was nothing short of astounding. Gleason Archer observed,

Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in

*1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (AD 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text ... The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.*²

A second benefit of the discovery was the fact that the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible could be shown to have predated the church. That is, early Christians could not have edited (perhaps falsified) the biblical text to make it appear as if Jesus miraculously fulfilled centuries-old prophecies. Books like Isaiah and its references to the virgin birth (7:14) or the suffering servant (52:13-53:12) could have been neither authored nor edited after the events they predicted.

Finally, the date of the Dead Sea Scrolls challenges critics' assumptions about the authorship of the book of Daniel. Critics frequently allege that Daniel was a late composition which first appeared in the second century BC, written to give Jews struggling against foreign powers a model to imitate in Daniel and his contemporaries, who languished under Babylonian rule. They argue that the pinpoint accuracy of Daniel's vision regarding the succession of kingdoms (Daniel chapters 2 and 7) cannot be an example of predictive prophecy, but merely 'prophecy' written after the fact (*ex eventu*). Having copies of Daniel dating to the second century BC indicate that the book was old enough to have been accepted as authoritative Scripture. A recent production would not have been accorded such status.

The Dead Sea Scrolls made for a fascinating discovery that continues to shed light upon Scripture today. They demonstrate the ancient Jews' commitment to copying Scripture with utmost fidelity. They also undermine critical theories that attempt to dismiss the possibility of predictive prophecy. Although the identity of those living at Qumran largely has been lost in the mists of time, the fruit of their labors continues to strengthen the faith of God's people today.

² Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, revised and expanded (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1994), 29.

walking away

Joseph McWhorter

In the second game of the 2018 football season, just minutes before halftime, veteran cornerback Vontae Davis left the Buffalo Bills sideline at New Era Field. He wasn't injured or ejected. He just left. He walked to the Bills locker room, changed his clothes, and drove home to meet his wife. Teammates called him a quitter. They called his decision disrespectful. Fans and commentators roasted and made fun of him for weeks. But Vontae did not budge. Even after multiple teams pursued him as a free agent, he stuck to his decision. Vontae Davis was permanently done with professional football.

To understand Davis's decision, we need to recognize the hurdles he faced throughout his ten year career. Davis was drafted in the first round of the 2009 NFL Draft by the Miami Dolphins. That preseason and regular season, he fought for a starting position on the Dolphins roster. Ultimately he had a wildly successful first year in the NFL and was renowned as one of the best defensive players of the 2009, collecting interceptions from future Hall of Famers Brett Favre and Tom Brady. After three successful seasons at Miami, Davis was traded to the Indianapolis Colts. The decision blindsided him and came in what Davis called an embarrassment. His vulnerable moment was secretly recorded and televised on national TV.

Davis played five successful years with the Colts. His career came crashing to a halt in the 2017 preseason, however, as he sustained a season-derailing groin injury. This was not his first injury. In 2010, Davis fractured his wrist. In 2011, he injured and reinjured his hamstring, missing four games. In 2012, he missed a total of six games because of a sprained knee and foot. In 2014, he was knocked out of two different games due to a knee injury and a concussion. In 2015, he sustained another concussion. In 2016, he sprained his ankle, sustained a third major concussion, and

began dealing with groin issues. By 2017, his body was falling apart.

That fateful game in Buffalo that he walked out of was the first game he had played in months. His decision was based on the fact the he had a life ahead of him and he didn't want to ruin it by punishing his body playing football. His heart was no longer in it. His priorities had changed. He told the NFL, "I've endured multiple surgeries and played through many different injuries throughout my career and, over the last few weeks, this was the latest physical damage. But today on the field, really hit me fast and hard; I shouldn't be out there anymore." One year later, Vontae still holds that walking away from that game was the best decision of his life.

So, what does this have to do with our Christian lives? Part of Christian life is transition and transformation. Paul wrote in Romans 12 to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind." The Greek word translated "transformed" is the word from which we get the English word "metamorphosis." Paul chose this same word in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to describe our transformation that comes from beholding the image of God.

A part of that transformation is walking away from things we realize are not healthy for us. God inspired the apostle to write, "you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God..." (Romans 6:22). God has cleansed us of sin and set us free from that slave-master. But that does not exempt the necessity to walk away from the sinful environments and practices in which we formerly lived. The question is, "how do we walk away?" We face pressure from former close friends to stay in the environment. We still have ties. We still have desires and temptations. How do we leave?

First, we need to let God live in us. Colossians 3:16-17 says:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

If we do not allow God to dwell in us through knowledge of his word, we are ignoring the most valuable resource in this life. We will not know how to transform ourselves into God's image because we will not even know what God looks like. We will not be able to have the strength to walk away from our lives because we are rejecting God's encouragement.

Second, we need to remember to whom we belong and what that means. "But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope" (Hebrews 3:6). We have been made a part of God's house. We have a confidence, a conviction that we gain at our salvation. It means God is with us, He hears us, and He cares about us. If we know that, we will desire Him more than we desire our old lives.

Finally, like Vontae Davis, we need to realize that our old lives were hurting us. Davis didn't walk away because he was bored. He walked away because football was destroying his body. We walked away from the lifestyle of sin because it was destroying our soul. Have we forgotten that? The verse that highlights this most is Romans 8:28, "we know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

God's rules and regulations are not there to be a hindrance for us. He does not tell us to abstain from something just to "yank our chain." In His ultimate wisdom, God knows the practices and attitudes that are good for us and that are bad for us. He wants us to live a happy and fulfilled life. We need to remember that.

Part of the transformation of Christianity is walking away from your old life. We should never be ashamed of having to walk away. Sometimes we need to walk away from people, sometimes places, sometimes actions, and sometimes attitudes. But remember, we are walking TOWARD the greatest being in existence. And that is always worth it.



FACE to FACE

with

JOHN and JOSEPH

*(Featuring Quarterly writer,
Joseph McWhorter)*

Podcast available at:

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Staying Spiritually Healthy

Kyle D. Frank

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. (3 John 2, ESV)

There is much discussion today about the importance of maintaining physical health. It seems that the lifespan of individuals has grown longer due to the blessings of modern medicine and proper nutrition available to nearly all in the “west” in contrast to many nations in Africa and the near east. Of course, to those who are familiar with Bible history, we only live a few years in comparison with those in the early pages of God’s word. This article is not about that, but of a health that is far more important—the health of our spiritual bodies. This investment returns far more dividends than that of those who champion physical health. Now, please do not misunderstand me, physical health is important—especially to those who do not enjoy such (like me), but the health and vigor of our inner man is far more important, as we shall be in the spiritual realm long after our physical shells are put off. Let’s take a little time and look to the health and welfare of our spirits. It is a topic that is not often discussed.

Like all things that have value, the health of our souls is something that must be worked at. Conscious thought and effort are required to accomplish this goal. The Scriptures tell us that we need to take steps to feed and nourish this part of our being. In 2 Peter 1:5-11, a “prescription” is given which, if followed, will lead to growth from a spiritual babe to a spiritual adult in full vigor and strength. It teaches us that we are to add to our faith (which we are told, comes by “hearing the word of God,” in Romans 10:17) virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and ultimately love—which is part of the greatest commandment: to love our LORD and God, and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). Finally, 2 Peter 1:11 tells us:

“For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” This is an admirable goal to press on toward, is it not?

At this point, let’s take a look at some other things that would be profitable for us to labor for. We will apply this in terms of our physical body for easy comparison.

A Functioning Immune System: Our body’s immune system helps ward off disease. Without this, we could be killed by a relatively small threat. Spiritually, how strong is our ability to withstand the temptations, false doctrine, persecutions, etc.? We need to understand that temptations and hardships are inevitable. They are a part of existing in this realm at this time. God is using the conditions that currently exist to test and strengthen us as we grow into that “spiritual adult” spoken of in several places throughout the Word of God. We cannot live “in a bubble,” and going “out of the world” is not possible. In John 17:15, Jesus is praying, and says

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”

We need to build up our resistance. James 4:7 tells us “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We are told “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” In 1 Cor. 10:12. We must “prepare our minds for action” or “gird up the loins of our mind” (1 Peter 1:13-14). We must

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-17).

We must also take heed that “Christ suffered in the flesh, [therefore] arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the

flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

Exercise: How many of those of us who struggle not to grow “ROUND” in body, hear that word: exercise, EXERCISE, EXERCISE!!! Well, guess what...If it applies to your physical body, it most likely applies to your spiritual body. The ASV tells us to

“exercise thyself unto godliness: for bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

The ESV replaces “exercise” with “train.” The scriptures teach us that the Lord’s church is a realm of activity. Ephesians 2:10 tells us:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

We have been saved to serve. Matt. 20:27-8 teaches us that “whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” In the Lord, there is work to be done; our time to relax is AFTER we get off of duty!! In Titus 3:8, and 14, “...those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works... And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.” Each of us individually has work to do (1 Cor.12:6-7, 18). It is not a time of ease as some among us seem to think. Jesus himself told us “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4). The “day” spoken of is our lifetime. “Night” comes at death, when no one can work. Lastly, we must work and be active while there is time and opportunity. (Gal. 6:9)

Rest and Nourishment: When we have labored and exhausted our resources in productive work (notice the word “PRODUCTIVE”), we need to get some rest and nourishment. Unfortunately, way too many see this as a continual state to dwell in. Too much food and too little exercise makes us fat and ungainly. Brief periods of rest can be seen in the Lord’s own ministry (Mark 6:30-31). The Lord Himself, our Creator, designed

us to function best within the cycles of work and rest. We do need some “downtime.” The Lord took time for the quiet disciplines of spiritual strength (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). “Rest” does not necessarily mean doing nothing as some define it. It does mean doing something different that will refresh us and restore our energy for work. Also, the biblical picture of the spiritually strong person is the image of ‘restful’ (rather than ‘frantic’) strength. See Psalms 1:3, 23:1-3, 92:12-14.

Whatever the content of our usual activity, we cannot retain our strength if we do not partake of periods of Bible study, prayer, and meditation on the things of God. Spiritually speaking, this is the “nourishment” spoken of in the heading above. We must have nourishment. We cannot continue without the fuel that will provide the strength required to do whatever is required of us. There is much said about hunger in this world—again, spiritual often follows physical. Would you go a week without eating anything to sustain your body? Well, very often we find brethren, “spiritual beings,” going a week or so between feedings. Scripture speaks of those being “weak” in regards to the Lord’s table. Well, this weakness will continue if you don’t “eat” as well. Do you only open your Bible in class (IF you do attend class)? That is like going without food for all the days between classes. If you cannot do it in regards to physical food, guess what....

In regards to either realm—whether physical or spiritual—any illness or weakness is a grave matter that needs immediate attention. 2 Cor. 13:5 tells us:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

Just like it is highly recommended that we have a physical, we also need a “spiritual physical.” We only have one chance to do things right. Hebrews 9:27 tells us:

“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

One time—that is it—let us take an inventory and make some hard decisions while there is still time. Think about it! ONE TIME!!!



God's Love, Man's Love, & SALVATION

Kevin Barham

Much is written and preached about God's love. We are all familiar with probably the most often quoted verse of the Bible: John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

This verse is so prevalent in its renown, at least in part, because of "the crazy-hair John 3:16 guy." If you grew up in the 70's, you know this guy. He seemed to be at every professional football game, and always got screen time. His image, with his afro-style, multi-colored wig and his "John 3:16" sign beamed into millions of households for ages.

It is doubtless that God's love is great, and that God's love is abundant. Without it, mankind would have no hope of eternal salvation. For all of man's technological advances, even in the last 40 years, mankind does not have it within itself to find, access, or devise his own salvation without God's love, grace, and mercy. It is truly a gift from God, who is "long-suffering to us-ward, not will-

ing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Thank God that we do not get what we deserve, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

But, because of God's perfect plan of salvation, God's love, alone, will not save mankind. God is still the God with all of those "omni" powers: Omnipotent (all-powerful); omniscient (all-knowing); omni-present (everywhere); and omnibenevolent (all good). But, God's creation of mankind includes his giving to man a "free will." Each person has the power to make choices about his or her life. We are free to accept God, and we are free to reject him.

Since God's love, alone, will not save us, we must understand man's duty to love and its relationship to salvation. We must, then, examine the up-side-down troubling teachings of Jesus.¹

¹ Lest one fail to realize the radical teachings of Jesus for how they changed the expectations of mankind's conduct under this new covenant, examine what God commanded Moses to command the children of Israel regarding retribu-

There is no question but that the pathway to salvation is through Jesus Christ. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). Though some of our religious friends take issue, there is no doubt but that the beginning of this pathway is through hearing the word, believing it, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins.²

This is obedience to the Gospel of Christ. Jesus said “if you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15), and “Except a man be born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). So, taking this step to salvation is evidence of man’s love of Christ and, by extension, love of God. But, unless one dies immediately upon coming up out of the waters of baptism, God expects more.

Teaching just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus turned to the multitude following him and said, “If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

As a youth, I was deeply troubled by this passage. I thought about it a lot. Was I really to hate my father and my mother? What about honoring them? Didn’t the Bible teach us that?

To discern the meaning of this troubling verse, we can look to the life of Jesus and how he dealt with his own earthly family, and we can look to Jesus’ teachings. Through this journey, we will learn more about the relationship of man’s love and salvation. The Greek word which was translated by the King James’ translators as “hate,” is the word *μισέω* (using the English alphabet the word would be written as “misei”). This word is used often in the Bible to mean exactly what is translated here in the King James Version, i.e., to hate. But it also means to detest and even to love less.

tion in Lev. 24:20 (“breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth”) and compare it with Jesus’ teaching concerning retribution in Matt. 5:38 (“...turn to him the other [cheek] also”); for adultery see Lev. 20:10 and compare with Matt. 5:28 and Jn. 8:3-11.

² No other manner of salvation can be found in the Bible. Though many pages could be spent sustaining this succession of events as the beginning of salvation, the true Gospel of Christ, our concentration for this article is upon love.

Jesus and his familial interactions

Jesus’ familial interactions demonstrate how our Savior prioritized his actions and yes, even his love. For this purpose, we will examine two scriptures: Luke 2:37-38 and Matthew 12:46-50.

In Luke, chapter 2, we find that as Jesus approached the age of accountability under Jewish law, the family of Joseph and Mary had assembled in Jerusalem at Passover. At the end of the Passover celebration, Joseph and Mary regrouped with their traveling company and began the long walk back to Galilee. They assumed that Jesus was somewhere in the company and set out. After a day’s journey, Joseph and Mary realized that Jesus was nowhere to be found and they returned to Jerusalem and found him in the Temple reasoning with the learned men. Mary spoke to Jesus and said, “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Jesus replied, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:38).

Whether while shopping, attending a sporting event, or in any large crowd, who hasn’t lost sight of a child? That sinking feeling in one’s gut and instantaneous worry are overwhelming. Imagine what Mary and Joseph were going through, having traveled a day’s journey, to find that their twelve year old had been left behind. They were, simply put, frantically worried. But from the child’s perspective, everything was fine. The child knew where he was and what he was doing. Even as a pre-adolescent, Jesus prioritized the work of God and godliness over the natural love of family. This priority for Jesus was quite natural, because he knew he had to be at work taking care of his Father’s business.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, as recorded in Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus was in a home of one of his followers, teaching.

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his arm toward his disciples, and said, Behold my

mother and my brethren! Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Again, Jesus prioritized the work of God and his relationship with his co-workers over the natural love of family.

Teachings of Jesus

Upon entering Jerusalem in the last week of his ministry, yea his life, Jesus taught in parables about those that rejected God's work and the repentance of one (Matt. 21:28-31); and about the wicked husbandmen who killed the lord's servants and even his son, refusing to give the lord his due fruits of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33-42). Word of these teaching reached the ears of the chief priests and Pharisees, and they sought to lay hands on Jesus, perceiving that these teachings were directed at them. But they were afraid of repercussions, because he had many followers. So, they devised a plan to entrap Jesus in his teachings and haul him before the Romans. Thus the temptation of Jesus by the Roman coin and taxes is found in Matt. 22:17. Finally, a Pharisee (denominated a lawyer in the King James Version) asked Jesus,

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

In Luke's account (Chap 10, verse 28), the lawyer stated the commandments, and Jesus replied, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live."

How is it that we are to love God? Jesus answered this question by saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He also said "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved by the Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). Further, Christ taught, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

So the point Jesus is making, yet again, is about the priorities of one's love. Our devotion to our loved ones of this world must, therefore, be less than our devotion to God. My earthly father and mother cannot save my soul. Only the Heavenly Father can do that. So we must prioritize our love toward God, through His Son, Jesus the Christ, above all else. We must keep that first commandment that Jesus spoke of: Loving God with all that we have and all that we are: heart, soul, and mind. We must keep this commandment to accede to the salvation that Jesus promised. So, while it is true that absent God's love of man, there is no salvation, it is further truth that absent man's love of God, there is no salvation.

There are a couple examples of men in the Bible who stumbled this test of their "first love" because of familial relations. When traveling through Samaria toward Jerusalem, Jesus was accompanied by a throng outside of a Samaritan village. In Luke 9:59-62, the story is recorded:

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Luke does not recount the reaction of these men receiving the rebuke from our Savior, as to whether the rebuke called them to their senses, but the words of Jesus here emphasize again that our priority must be on God and His work, and not on familial relations or obligations.

The incident with the man often referred to as "the rich young ruler" in Matthew 19:16-22, is an example of priorities other than family which may exceed our devotion to God:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou

shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Though shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter in the kingdom of heaven.

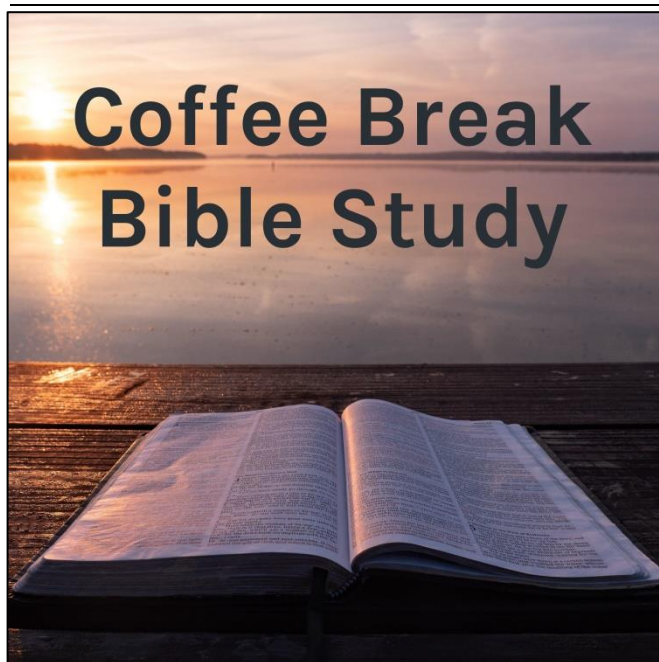
In this example, the priority of the rich young man wasn't familial love or earthly relationships with others, but it illustrates a priority which exceeded the priority of his love toward God and willingness to do the work. Because his priority was his earthly wealth, he refused God and his own salvation.

We must have the love of God as our first love, but we must strive daily to maintain that love and not neglect it. It is possible to have that "first love," being on the road to salvation, and then

make a turn and lose the road, and thus lose salvation. Jesus had a stern warning for those who lost their first love in Revelation 2:2-5, where he was speaking to church at Ephesus:

I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars: And has borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake has labored, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

Even despite the Ephesian Christians' labor and patience, and despite their clinging only to the truth, rejecting those that are false teachers and false apostles, Jesus found them lacking because their Godly priority had slipped and God was no longer their first love. Jesus called them to repentance so as not to lose their salvation. We must examine ourselves daily and ask: What is my first love today? On what shall I labor?



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VIRTUE-PROOF AND THE INESCAPABLE BOX

The Author Formerly Known as William Howard

The kamikaze pilots of Japan during the second world war were placed into a plane filled with explosives. The mission was a one-way trip as a human guidance system for a flying bomb, where both plane and pilot are destroyed. The job did not take much skill and the qualifications were not stellar. They were dispensable and one-use only. Training went relatively quick and enforced the idea of total self-sacrifice for Japan and the emperor. The job was to kill while being killed. Once a pilot was trained and the mission arranged there was a farewell ritual and a last letter to home. With the pilot in the plane and the cockpit closed, then would be the point of no return. There could be no change of heart nor escape. He was locked and bound into a hopeless, terminal path. Escorting him on his mission were fighter planes whose mission it was to report the results and enforce the goal. The kamikaze pilot was not to deviate from the plan with a sudden desire to live. They would see to it that, one way or another, the Kamikaze pilot was killed. He was flying to his death – that was his sole purpose. In the cockpit he is fixed to a sure conclusion. The pilot could not return. All

was lost. The only thing they could look forward to in their future was to be recognized at a special shrine visited by the emperor. The Kamikaze pilots would offer their parting words to each other, “I’ll see you at the shrine.” This is all terribly tragic and empty. Truly, all was lost.

Realistically the Special Attack Unit (as it was called) could not be a long-term tactic. They were steadily forfeiting resources they could not afford to lose. The pool of volunteers was drying up as was the number of useable planes. All were valuable commodities which could not be easily replaced, and as the war continued so did desperation. Soon what had been voluntary became compulsory. A pilot who valued his life and was satisfied with a continuous role in the war was now forced into squandering everything in one shot. Any potential he may have had for future missions would be lost. These pilots had no recourse, no choice and no fighting chance. Escape or surrender were impossible. A man could either be killed for his country or be killed by his country. It all led to death.

This is the sort of situation Satan favors. Every-

thing moves unstoppably toward ruin with obstacles large enough to obscure all option, solution, and route to freedom. This is a place purposefully designed to be confusing, isolated, and bleak. The machinery is present to resist even a solitary, levelheaded thought. Satan would want to stuff us into an inescapable box where sin is the only answer.

This, of course, is only in appearance. It is a ploy. He is incapable of actually creating such a predicament. The words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 expose Satan's limitations. These are words from someone who wants us to know the reality of any difficult situation.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Satan is willing to use anything he can against us. He will use fear to prey on the naive. He will fuel the thoughts of public disgrace to the arrogant. He will lie to both the simple and wise. Apathy, greed, pride, and despair are powerful motivators for wrong while demotivating any move to do right. This is the supposed inescapable box. Satan cannot create a condition where wickedness is the only available action. There is a way out. Satan uses the thoughts of dread, embarrassment, and despondency to make the way of escape seem the worst possible direction. While it may be painful, it will never have the detriment of sin.

In 1 Samuel 13 the Philistines gathered their masses for war at Michmash. Saul was in Gilgal (to the southeast) and waited for Samuel as he was told to do. There would be a sacrifice to God when Samuel arrived. Because of the threat of war, the people were scattering and hiding. Saul became desperate as Samuel was delayed. The Philistines

are coming. The people are leaving. Saul knows a sacrifice to Jehovah should be made before he moves against the Philistine army. As he is forced to wait, he worries. With each passing day the enemy may invade further into Israel and his men may abandon him, leaving him with a smaller army. Without Samuel he becomes desperate and decides to make the sacrifice on his own. This is something he was not permitted to do and is indefensible. He was unaware that this made his situation much worse. It is best to have the Philistines as your enemy than God. This would not be his last bad decision.

In 1 Samuel 31 Saul is routed by the Philistines. They are ever closing in. Saul feared what they might do to him as he was King of Israel. He saw himself having few alternatives left and none of them appealing. He could not defeat the Philis-



tines. There were too many. He could not outrun them. He did not want to be captured by them. This would appear to be an inescapable box, a place where no option is good. His saw his one and only choice – suicide. But there was one more choice, one he did not con-

sider – prayer for mercy and salvation. Turn to God. Here is the One who could help in a time of dead end and despair.

The temptations we see every day are not so dramatic or involved. They are only spontaneous desires which Satan uses against us. There are no complex sets of emotional forces pushing us to sin. Nothing is complex about being lured by what we want. It is a matter for the moment and the way of escape is easy, quick, and conclusive. The temptation is over, and we move on to what we should have been doing. It is as easy as that, as complicated as that. The temptation is thwarted, and we are strengthened. There is no unavoidable sin or necessary evil. The longing will pass, but the results of sin are disastrous.

Let us now create a word. The word is “virtue-proof.” I think it is an adjective, since it seems to

describe nouns. So, what does “virtue-proof” mean? We must define it.

Virtue-proof

1: Protecting the goals of an evil action to the point of preventing any possible resistance, regardless of opposition.

2: Plunging recklessly into a wicked plan with all steps to eliminate the possibility of changing the plan through a sudden moral impulse.

3: Assuring the success of evil and the failure of anyone to stop it, including one’s own second thoughts or reconsiderations.

Virtue-proof is similar to foolproof but with a definite distinction. When you try to foolproof something you prepare it so anyone can use it. You cannot get it wrong even if you tried. No matter what happens a foolproof plan should still work. Virtue-proof is different. It is an effort to keep a wicked plan in motion by eliminating any possibility of virtue or goodness from interfering. This includes anyone involved in the plan. Should someone rethink their part they will be powerless to stop it. Let us look at a case in point.

In Mark 15:39 there is a man who was part of the mechanism that crucified Christ. The scheme was set into motion and, as it happened, included him. He is a gearwheel in a dangerous machine intended to be virtue-proof.

So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

This Roman centurion suddenly came to an overdue conclusion. He just witnessed the execution of a Jewish man, but there is more to this than first thought. On the cross are words placed there by the governor of Judea. It is a sign written in in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin for all to read: “**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**” (John 19:19). Those words are not mockery. They are not describing the offender’s crimes. This goes deeper by far. A Roman officer now understands the disastrous mistake. On this cross is the Son of God and he helped make it happen. He did his part in killing the Christ and now it was too late. A man simply

doing his duty on a very strange day discovers the apparent manipulation behind it. His position was used with so many others to murder the Christ. The powers behind this moved everyone forward in ignorant and fearful compliance. If this centurion had come to the conclusion a few hours earlier, or days earlier, he still could have done nothing to change the intended outcome.

Virtue-proof is the strategy of wickedness. It is the only workable plan for plausible victory – everyone moves mindlessly forward regardless of fact or conscience. It must create a godless situation preserved from good. Satan prefers men virtue-proof, easily manipulated and robbed of goodness. Satan would like one whole day that is virtue-proof in which evil reigns and nothing good exists. He wants a reality with God defeated, an eternal reality stripped of love, holiness, and forgiveness. Satan wants a world without mercy, without hope, where nothing is sacred, and all is lost – a chaotic, eternal bedlam, an endless madhouse.

This level of evil-at-all-cost is seen in history. It leaves you wondering how people could become involved in unthinkable depths of evil. These individuals seemed reasonable and sensible enough to know better, but somehow sink into a nasty situation that looks unstoppable. But God will stop them all. In Genesis 6:5 the world is filled with an escalating evil. Satan uses the power, talents, wealth, and cleverness of men (and anything else he can use) to tear them down, to destroy everything good.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

This was a place tainted, gangrenous, and perverse. There could not be found a wholesome thought. This is Satan’s sort of world and it took him about 1,500 years from Genesis 3 to Genesis 6 to make it so vile. It appears to be virtue-proof. Nothing good could occur. Good is mocked, banned, hunted, and killed. You are either a villain or a victim, the choice is yours. The condition of the world would seem irreversible, pressed beyond the tipping point. Evil begets evil and there is no recovery imaginable. The weight of wickedness grew remarkably with humanity compelling every resource, including all imagination, into sin. Evil

wins... except it doesn't.

It never can.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:8).

Satan did not manage to get everyone. There was a family surrounded by wickedness, but they were good. It must have been a difficult life for a righteous family. No doubt, they were in danger from the iniquity and bloodshed around them. When God washed the earth clean with a flood it would have been a different life for them.

God will not allow evil to win. In Hebrews 11:25, Moses had a choice to make, **choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.** The pleasures of sin are temporary. The power of sin is no better.

Usually people are not totally void of good. Ordinarily there is an assortment of both good and bad as most people do not want to be entirely evil. That level of evil takes them further than they want to go and outside any comfort of how they would like to think of themselves.

Shame is a powerful thing and we like to believe better of ourselves, preferring to suppose there is something good about us. But people can get caught up by forces guiding them, funneling them deeper into wicked behavior than expected. The driving undercurrents of a mob make for a case in point. What controls a mob? Sometimes it can be one person provoking people into a combustible mix. At other times the eruption of a mob appears spontaneous and mindless. It explodes out of nowhere into a lethal, unpredictable mass of people without anyone steering it. Most of those involved would never have been so savage by themselves. As is often stated the day after, "Things got out of hand." The group itself became the heat and the fuel for everyone in the group. A lit mob does not look for a reason nor does it voluntarily stop to

consider the outcome and consequence. It cannot be constrained easily nor addressed without power backing the message. It detonates into lawlessness impressed by its own strength and fed by its own mayhem. Anything that is not the mob is a likely target.

A mob is designed to be a virtue-proof entity used to wield power. It uses chaos and confusion to the advantage of keeping everyone in the mob ignited, active, and brutal. There are various mobs recorded in the Bible. The one in Ephesus (Acts 19) is quite telling. It begins with one man – Demetrius, a silversmith. This man does not constitute a mob, but his words will bring one about. His influence spreads quickly from a few silversmiths to engulf all Ephesus. There are two verses that tell the dynamics of the mob and the mental state of the people in the mob.

So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's

travel companions (Acts 19:29).

Here they are perplexed and furious. No one understood what this was about, but it must have been bad. So, what do they do? They seize two innocent men. Why? These Macedonian men became instant targets to emotionally driven and confused Ephesians. Something dire was happening, but no one knew what it was or how it started.

Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together (Acts 19:32).

The city clerk quieted them down with a warning that the city could be called into question because of such anarchy and the Romans would em-



ploy a heavy hand on them all. The mob was primed to kill, which would have pleased Demetrius, but the voice of reason entered to stop it. This angry Ephesian multitude was spontaneously generated and thus squelched with words of authority and warning. Real orchestration is needed to keep a mob on task.

The next mob is more organized with a plan and oaths to keep all loyal to the goals. In Acts 23:12-15 is a group of evil men who made a pact. They determined to kill Paul and began setting up a virtue-proof plan as best they can.

And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Let us examine the details meant to keep this plan intact. There were more than forty men ready to kill. They had enough participants to cover the unexpected. These men gathered to make this murder happen. Everyone must be unswerving, reliable, and bolted into place. Therefore, they take a vow to kill Paul and will not eat anything until he is dead. That puts an urgency to it. It should keep things timely and moving at a proper pace. But it also places them in a trapped position. They willingly imposed this by their own vow. The oath's implication is do or die. Either Paul is killed, or the failed assassins starve to death. Each must commit himself to this evil act or die slowly of starvation. If the group is willing to kill Paul, it is also ready to kill the disloyal. There are to be no second thoughts or sudden bouts of virtue. Murder is the goal. Of course, any of these men could leave this wicked, little group. Any one of them could do right. But fear locks them into their inescapable box. With full cooperation from the chief priests and elders everything should be sealed

tight. Nothing could stop this act of supportive evil. Except Christ has other plans for Paul (Acts 23:11). The plot of so many men is discovered, avoided, and comes to nothing. This world is never virtue-proof. Reality is not virtue-proof. It is impossible. God reigns over everything in holiness. His will is done, and Satan is always be disappointed. Satan will always be the loser.

The most curious of all mobs is the one at the crucifixion of Christ. Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as if receiving a king. It is exactly as described in Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey colt, the foal of a donkey.

The people shout aloud what the Pharisees did not want whispered, "**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!**" (Luke 19:38). It would only be a few days until this city changed its mood. These people, as a whole, are emotionally driven, easily herded, and unstable. They welcomed Jesus as the King who comes in the name of Jehovah, and then a few days later forced Him to carry His cross out of the city to be killed as a blasphemer. That indeed is a sea-change. But mood swings are in their history. In the beginning of John 6 there are thousands following Jesus. They search for Him diligently and want to make Him king. Toward the end of the chapter (John 6:66) they have shifted their opinion.

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

Powerful men in Jerusalem feared this multitude (Matthew 21:26), but knew how to provoke it for what they wanted. They will play on their fear.

The necessary means to turn the people against Christ was set. Everything was firmly in place. The tracks were laid, and the train was ready to push forward. Fear would keep the Jews in line (John 9:22, 12:42) with intimidation so strong that even Peter with his previous bravado would scatter with the rest of the sheep (Zechariah 13:7). The one who was determined that Jesus would not be killed (Matthew 16:22) and was ready to die with Him (Mark 14:31) would deny Him instead. The rulers prodded Pilate through threats intended to

drive this politician toward their objective.

“If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar” (John 19:12-13).

What did they tell Pilate? The message marks their determination, “If you let Jesus go you are Caesar’s enemy, and we will let him know.”

When did these men become interested in loyalty to Caesar? It was Pilate’s deep concern since his life and career rested on Caesar’s disposition toward him. The rulers of Israel are politically savvy and know how to get Pilate’s attention.

But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15)

See how far they have gone, Caesar before Christ. They also choose Barabbas before Christ. Barabbas was a notorious prisoner (Matthew 27:16), a robber (John 18:40), a murderer in a rebellion (Mark 15:7, Luke 23:19). The rulers controlled the voice of the people for the release of Barabbas.

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

This was not compassion for Barabbas, but hatred of Jesus. Even though Barabbas was an insurgent and cutthroat, the Jewish people would have less worry from him than with Caesar. Preferring anyone over Christ is a poor choice. They were willing to take both rather than Jesus, anyone and anything but Christ. Barabbas was now free to do what he had been doing before capture. And Caesar might have been amused if he learned the Jewish leaders chose him over their Messiah – he was their king. Neither is a replacement. This mob gained nothing and lost everything.

Cruelty consumed them. Such malice will strip everything good from them. They broke laws and legal procedures to push their predetermined goal: crucifixion. It is madness under single-minded obsession. They will stop at nothing and pay everything.

And all the people answered and said, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25).

When they are willing to utter those words then they are a mob indeed. They do not measure the decision. They do not consider the result. They want justice to be virtue-proof, at least in this trial. They want everyone to feel as though they were in an inescapable box – from the common people to Pilate himself. All opposition is to fear. Be silent or just deny Him (John 18:16-27). All are to think there is no power in righteousness. All are to think there is no choice but to follow those leading this work of evil. Why? They just want Jesus dead. Why? The reasons do not seem to matter, and the price does not matter—until later when suddenly it does. An angry mob is not used for rational reflection. It is to be rash, bad-tempered, and loud. That is what it is. Heedless cruelty is why a mob is used.

Why were these people so ruthless toward Christ? They show more compassion to the thieves crucified with him. In Matthew 27:39-44 they pass by Him and blaspheme Him, and the thieves join in. It was not enough to kill Him; they want to break Him before He dies. In all the head wagging, mocking, and spitting something happened. Salvation was done and redemption paid. There was mercy offered. It is not given for the mob, that is an unruly thing, but to each person in it. This is for the individual to be set apart. In quiet moments the consequence for actions become a concern. They suddenly matter. It is possible there were many people in that mob who, on a new day, asked the question, “**Men and brethren, what shall we do?**” (Acts 2:37). The greatest virtue, the greatest love, the greatest act of mercy was done. Satan could not stop it. In everything that seemed so entirely void of good came the greatest good. Who could have predicted it? Certainly, Satan could not have foreseen it. His attempts always run against the impossible. You cannot destroy good. This was his ideal inescapable box. This was his perfect virtue-proof setting and plot against God. When could this ever be repeated? When could this ever be equaled in scope and in masterful manipulation? It cannot be. If Satan failed here, then he can never create his preferred situation, free of good, an inescapable box for all.

WHY JESUS **RE-CENTERED** THE LAW

John Krivak

*“Do not think that I came to abolish
the Law or the Prophets;
I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”
Matthew 5:17 (NASB)*

A picture that hangs crooked upon the wall. Steering that has fallen out of alignment. Cheerleaders who have lost enthusiasm. News reports that slant with bias. Standing posts that now lean out of plumb. Preaching that seldom mentions the Cross. Spinning ceiling-fans that wobble on the axis. Narcissists. Many things need to be re-centered.

Jesus re-centered the Law

As Jesus saw it, the Torah had lost its true center. The Law given by God through Moses was out of kilter. Yet as given by God, this magisterial legislation was flawless. The Law would define the relationship between an entire nation and God. That Covenant projected everything intended, hoped for, expected, and demanded for the Israelite people and religion. Had the Old Covenant legislation been faulty, Jesus might have simply abolished it. But He rejected that prerogative outright (Matt. 5:17ff.), opting instead to bring the misaligned Law to its fulfillment. It would be restored to proper balance.

Credit the genius of Jesus for spotting the misuse and for finding the fix. His insights brighten the Gospel narratives—on-target critiques and shrewdly conceived corrections against applications of Law that enjoyed popular and widespread acceptance. Jesus saw a problem that somehow eluded everyone else. As the quip of G.K. Chesterton has it: *“It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they cannot see the problem.”* What

bothered Jesus (and often stoked His temper red-hot) did not raise any concern at all among respected religious authorities! Why not? What was it that troubled Jesus so, provoking Him to lash out “woes” of condemnation and charges of hypocrisy against the leading practitioners of Torah?

How Jesus viewed the Law

I once ordered a pair of eyeglasses. When I slipped them on, I found that distant objects would come into focus only within a narrow “sweet spot” in the lenses. Everything outside of that spot was a blur. When it came to views on the Law, Jesus alone found the “sweet spot” for clear vision: relationship! As applied, did the Law draw one closer to other people and to God? Or, did it create friction, distrust, selfishness—relational distance? Same Torah—vastly different impacts on the relational space between us. Jesus could see it.

Note that I tend to speak of “relationship” where others (including Jesus) might say “love.” It’s just semantics (same meaning; different words). We need an umbrella-term to cover all the dynamics that play out between us. There was no word for “relationship” in Koine Greek; the ancients spoke of love. Yet in our common speech, love is but one of many dynamics found under the umbrella of “relationship.” Such dynamics include faithfulness and loyalty, righteousness, and many others. The case can be made that love is, in fact, the supreme relational dynamic and therefore qualifies as the umbrella. I cannot argue with that (nor would I wish to). Still, in common modern usage, “relationship” serves well as the larger inclusive. In this, I am confident that Jesus would call out claims to “love” when relationships get short shrift.

Beatitude: A good place to start is with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Strikingly, He offers nothing in His beatitude-blessing for the most accurate tither, for priests and Levites, for those careful to wear phylacteries, for keepers of Sabbath, or for avoiders of "ritual uncleanness." Such considerations we might expect from any Law-observant Jew of the day. But Jesus holds-out reward for good and noble hearts which, even under pain and duress, bring support, strength, and vitality to relationships. Blessed are those, who—even while poor (whether in money or in spirit), or even while processing funeral emotions, or even while hurt and humiliated under persecution—blessed are those who yet show gentleness, make for peace, and still hunger for righteousness (when most people, under such circumstances, would be ready to upchuck). This gives us a glimpse at what only Jesus saw.

Righteousness: Imagine Jesus as optometrist, making adjustment and asking if this improves our vision: *"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20, NASB)? It is a mistake to see "righteousness" merely as a forensic word for use in a courtroom, without application first to the quality of one's relationships. The righteous man not only hears, *"Not guilty!"*, he attends to and brings success to his relationships! Consider the Good Samaritan. A man sorely in need of a friend is bypassed by priest and Levite—models of Law-keeping who (probably to avoid uncleanness) fail to be friends. But along comes a Samaritan! Operating outside the Law, yet he proves to be attentive to the demands, needs, and concerns of relationship. This man is Jesus' hero! Again, semantically, we may substitute "love" for "relationship," if we define love as *"anything and everything needed to bring relationship to success."* To be righteous as Law-keeper places "love" in the sweet spot.

Personal Relationships: Six times in Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus takes a Law and re-centers it, each time proclaiming: *"You have heard that it was said, _____. But I say to you, _____."* Each considers a Law-demand impacting interpersonal relationships: murder, adultery, divorce, vows (truth-telling), retaliation, and restricting love (enemies not included). In each case, Jesus intensifies to a stricter demand. For example, the Law merely

forbade adultery, the act itself; but Jesus is much stricter, forbidding even a lustful look. But there is more. In each case, Jesus is more attentive to concerns of relationship. Stricter? Yes, but always in a direction that prevents relational failure (sin) and enhances relational success (love). Let's consider the Rich Young Ruler (Matt. 19:16ff.) in this sweet spot. Here was a man flawless before strict requirements of the Decalogue, and so he surely considered himself righteous. But Jesus called him on a relational requirement (sell everything and give it to the poor) nowhere so demandingly stated in the Law. The stricter demand insisted by Jesus was not extra to Torah. Rather it was germane to it. Jesus arrived to re-center the people of The Book!

The Golden Rule: One more insight from the Sermon, then we will look to what Jesus regarded as greater, and then as greatest requirements of the re-centered Law. In 7:12, Jesus reduces the Law's ethical and moral demands to a single, terse maxim: *"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* What could possibly be more simple and yet more comprehensive? Torah generates relational wholeness if one uses the optic of the Son of God! Christians under the New Covenant understood this: *"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law"* (Romans 13:8-10).

Greater Matters of Torah: We should take careful notes when Jesus prioritizes the Law's demands. Jesus was greatly troubled by those who thought they lived up to the Law though their reading was un-centered: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"* (Matt. 23:23-24). If relational matters are set

aside, resulting Law-keeping is greatly diminished in value! Yet even those obediences are important within the Law: “...these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

The Greatest: Finally, Jesus re-centers the Law relationally when He determines the two greatest commandments: “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (22:37-40). It’s all about relationship; it’s all about love.

The Law and the Cross

The evil of sin is set forth more clearly by the Cross than by the Torah. One could count violations of Law and get somewhat of a measure. But the true depth and measure of evil is truly reckoned only by what sin did to the Son of God on the Cross. Law merely shows legal violations; the Cross displays the shredding of relationships. Moreover, what the Cross is capable of accomplishing by atonement, resurrecting truly dead relationships, was well beyond any power of Torah. Those who love keep commandments (John 14:15); but one may keep them and still be a stranger to love (1 Cor. 13). Jesus can see the difference.

Galatians 3:10-14 is stunning Scripture. Jesus is said to have run afoul of the Law (though He never violated the Law by breaking it). Rather, merely by being the victim of crucifixion, Jesus was brought under the Law’s curse: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”*— He accepted a place on the wrong side of Law to be on the right side of relationship! We see something similar when Jesus heals on the Sabbath at the risk of being accused of breaking Sabbath (something that, as most would agree, should reasonably be done even for a trapped animal).

mandatum novum:

The New Commandment

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that

you also love one another” (John 13:34, NASB). If “*Do unto others*” was the “*gold standard*” in the Golden Rule, then what higher standard is this? Love is now measured against the standard of Jesus’ love (which is an expression of the quality of love shared among the Trinity)! Yet in 1 John 2:7-8, the new “love one another” commandment is said also to be “not new” in some sense. The commanded demand for love was always inherent in the Law. But it sounded novel, new, and avant-garde when Jesus spoke it. He was the only rabbi in town who recognized the interpretive center of Torah.

Religion VS Relationship

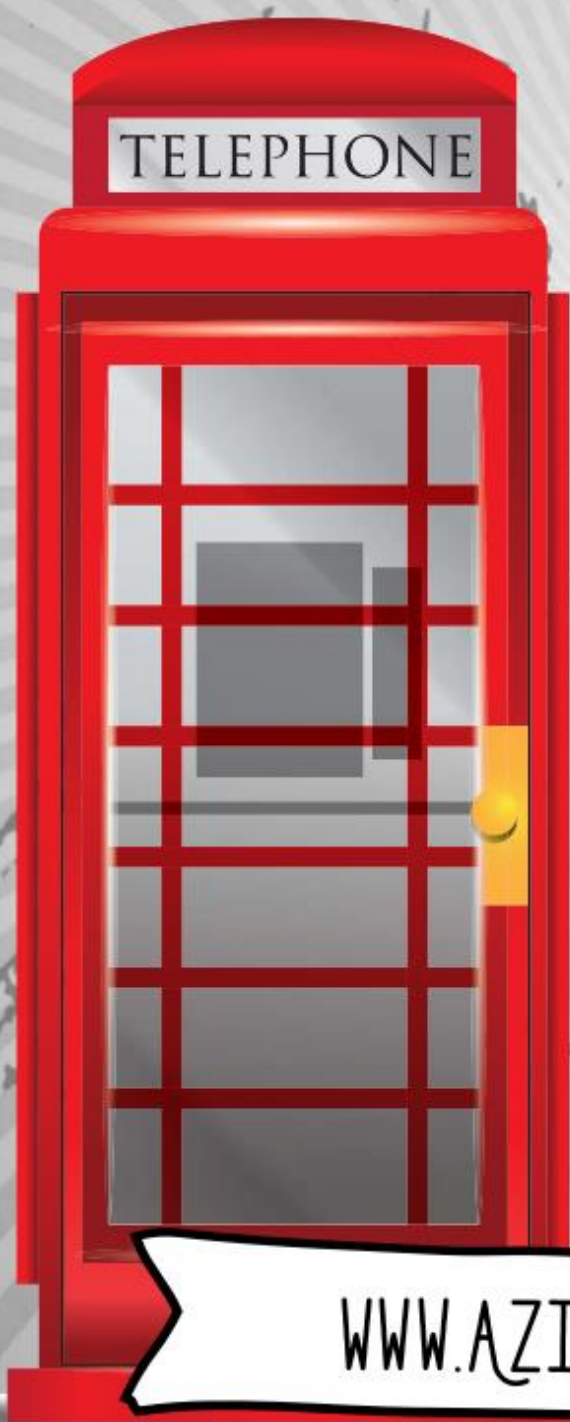
My co-worker spoke a concept popular in our day: “*Christianity really isn’t a religion; it’s a relationship!*” That seems quite right in what it affirms (relationship) and quite wrong in what it denies (religion). After all, the two things are not exclusive. One certainly can embrace both religion and relationship, even if the ancient tendency to merely embrace religion is still quite common in our day.

It would be ironic indeed if Jesus’ attempt to re-center on relationship resulted in dismantling the Christian religion! Jesus had no such intention. And religion is the necessary word when Christians are called together into organized fellowship that we call church. Christianity, from the local congregation up to global Christian fellowship, is plainly religious. There will ever be those who insist, quite wrongly, that they can connect with God and salvation, while entirely isolated from “organized religion.” It seems that Jesus, in His day, never encountered a single soul who entertained such notions—must be a modern American phenomenon.

But ours is an increasingly fractured and disconnected culture, full of individuals who are isolated even when joined into crowds and groups. We are alone together, even in church. Why did Jesus re-center the Law? Because, it is always easier to make “religion” the center. Real relationships are messy and require hard work. Relationships must be the center!



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IF THE NEXT ONE WAS TO BE YOUR VERY LAST ONE ...?

ECCLESIASTES 9:10

Gerald Cowan

INTRODUCTION:

There's a game called "What if it was your last one." It's a fun game to play. "What would you do, say, or want if it was to be your very last ____?" You can put anything you want in the blank, if you are asking the question. People usually put some shallow, superficial, or frivolous thing there. Nobody really wants the *game* to be heavy and serious. The fact that anything might really be your *last* in any category is a thought that seldom crosses one's mind. We don't want to think of anything as being the last we will have. Perhaps we should think about it more often.

Suppose it was serious, not a game, and you really had to choose your next and last thing. We have heard it said: *Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work no device, no knowledge and no wisdom in the grave to which you are going* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

If you had to choose your next and last anything, what would it be?

**LET'S PLAY THE GAME FOR A MOMENT – I
WILL ASK THE QUESTIONS. BUT WE WILL
KEEP IT LIGHT. NOTHING VERY SERIOUS
YET.**

What if your next meal was to be your very last meal ever? If it was truly your last meal, would you want it to be good for you, or good tasting?

Would you want anyone to share it with you?

What if it was the last article of clothing you'd ever buy or receive? Would it be casual, dressy, or formal? Seasonal, or "all season"? Would you worry about material, texture, color, fit, and durability? If you chose shoes, would they be for dress, work, or play? Flip-flops?

What if it was to be the last book you'd ever read, the last movie or video you'd ever see, or the last music you'd ever hear? Would it be a favorite that you'd like to experience again, or would it be something new, something you haven't seen, read, or heard yet? Would you want it to be factual or fictional? Entertaining or enlightening? About people or about places? Would it be the Bible?

What if it was your last car, last house, last town or State? Would your car be a sedan, station wagon, SUV or ATV? Perhaps a convertible? Would your house be a town house or country house, cottage or condominium? Would your location of choice be small town or big city, beach front, or backwoods? East, West, North, South or one of the central states? Or in some other country?

What if it was the last trip you'd ever get to take, your last time to go anywhere? Where would you want to go? Some familiar place, or someplace you'd never seen? Who would you want to go with you, if anybody? If you were "away from home" you might want to "go home." Our occa-

sional “homecomings” are a small sample of this idea.

NOW LET’S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE SERIOUS.

Suppose it was the last worship service you would ever attend (Hebrews 13:15). Where and with whom would you want to meet? What particular worship activities would you want? How would you participate in singing and praying if you would never be able to sing and pray again? (1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19). If your contribution was the last you would ever be able to give, what would it be? Do you have something laid by in store, or something you should have given before but have not? (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 9:7). What would your feelings be during the communion of the Lord’s Supper if you knew you would never again eat and drink in this memorial to Christ with the church and with the Lord? (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

What if the next sermon or discussion of the word of God you hear would be your last? Preachers sometimes think about, “If my next sermon was to be the last I would ever preach, what would it be?” But the point here is about *you*. If the next sermon you hear would be the last you would ever hear, who would you want to preach it? Probably everybody has some degree of “preacheritis” – a favorite preacher, or someone they’d like to hear one last time. Perhaps you wouldn’t really care who preached it, if it is really to be your very *last* sermon. The preacher is irrelevant; the *message* is what really counts. So... What would you want it to be about? I doubt that many people would want it to be about “the eschatological implications of the epiphany of Moses and Elijah with Christ at his transfiguration.” You might not want to hear about “the mystical use of gematria and iconography in apocryphal and apocalyptic literature.” I doubt many would choose to hear one more “critique of denominational dogma or the qualifications of elders and deacons and whether a woman can serve as a deacon.” Those things might be interesting and chal-

lenging, probably worthwhile. But is it what you would want for your very *last* sermon?

A non-Christian might want to know “how to be saved” (Acts 16:30, Acts 2:37). An unfaithful Christian might want to know how to “come home again to God.” If you have been struggling with temptation, trouble, trial, oppression, persecution, or hardship you might want your last sermon to be about “the strength God supplies, and how God will balance all accounts, both for the righteous and the unrighteous.” If you are a faithful Christian you might want it to be a reminder of “the joys and blessings of heaven,” assurance that your hope in Christ has been well placed.

How would you listen to a sermon if it were to be your very last one? Would you listen the way you usually do? Would you give it the same amount and intensity of attention you usually give to the preaching of God’s word? Now, in this case, since you have chosen the subject, and perhaps

also chosen the preacher, maybe you could ignore all the usual distractions around you and in your own mind and pay attention, really try to hear and understand every part of it. You would probably listen the way Cornelius did, ready to obey as soon as you were told what was required by God (Acts 10:33).

Change the subject for something a little more seri-

ous. Suppose it was the last time you would ever see or be with your husband or wife, your children or parents, your brothers and sisters, your friends, your neighbors, or the church. What would you want them to say? What would you say to them? Are there some words you would want to be sure you didn’t leave unsaid? Perhaps you would want to resolve any conflicts existing between you and others, clear up all misunderstandings and apologize for your words, acts, and attitudes of the past – all those things that have hurt you, and have hurt others too. Perhaps you would want to reassure these people of your love and concern, tell them how important they have been and are to you. I doubt you would spend your last time with them trading jokes, talking about weather, sports, the stock market, the design of the new cars, or the

If the next sermon you hear would be the last you would ever hear, who would you want to preach it? ... Perhaps you wouldn’t really care who preached it... The preacher is irrelevant; the message is what really counts.

cute things your pet does. Perhaps you would be bold enough to tell them some spiritual truth they need to hear. You might talk to them about salvation, even if you know they don't want to hear it. This point is so important that we will take another look at it in a few moments.

HERE'S SOMETHING REALLY "HEAVY" AND SERIOUS: SUPPOSE YOU KNEW THIS WOULD BE THE LAST DAY OF YOUR LIFE.

You probably would not want to waste it. You would try to make every minute count. How would you want to spend it? Reading a book, listening to music, watching a movie, or taking a nap? Not likely. Planning, preparing, or eating a meal? Food might not seem very important. Let's get back to the point we were making earlier. You'd probably try to heal some broken relationships and "mend some fences" between yourself and others, seeking forgiveness from those you've injured or sinned against, seeking reconciliation with those who have been your enemies. You'd probably want to reassure your loved ones that you do in fact love them, appreciate them, wish them well. You might spend some time tearing down your barns and dispensing your goods to those who can still make use of them and benefit from them. Make sure of your "Last Will and Testament," and how any assets you have accumulated would be distributed.

Who would you want to spend the day with, have close to you on your final day? Be realistic. Don't say the apostle Paul. Don't name your dead relatives and friends. That would not be possible. You would probably want to be with those who mean most to you in your life now: your living family members and friends. Maybe family and friends from whom you have been estranged, those you abandoned and those who abandoned you. Not a stranger, not some person you've never met and do not know. If you are a Christian, perhaps you'd want to spend at least part of the day with your spiritual family. I've been present when someone died in a church service. He knew he was ill; he knew he could die at any time. But he said

he couldn't think of any place he'd rather be than worshiping God in an assembly of Christians.

You would no doubt spend some time making sure of your right relationship with God, trying to assure your heart before Him (1 John 3:19). It is said, "In a time when death seems imminent, your whole life flashes before your eyes." I think at such times we do some instant, intense, and honest soul searching. The trouble is, you may see many things that need correction but have no time to correct them, no time to make things right, even with God. One who has not become a Christian at all would certainly want to make sure he has obeyed the gospel of God so that the Lord will not reject him. If one has not done that, he would probably lay everything else aside as relatively unimportant, until he was sure he had done what God requires.

The trouble is, you may see many things that need correction but have no time to correct them, no time to make things right, even with God.

As a preacher I have had this experience a number of times – I'm sure many other preachers could say the same: someone who is dying or thinks he is wants to make a confession, have someone join him in prayer, and hope he can be forgiven. A few times I've had someone who had rejected the gospel and refused baptism ask to be baptized. Sometimes it could be done; sometimes not. Strange as it may seem, I've had this experience too: a man who had rejected the gospel, refused to obey it, even though he knew he was dying (he did die). He said it would be a sign of weakness or cowardice on his part. He said, "A long time ago I made my choice against God, and I'll stick with it. I will not try to hedge my bet now, even though I'm dying."

CONCLUSION:

The fact is, we generally have a hard time thinking that anything in any category will actually be our last one. Surely not our last worship opportunity, our last sermon to preach or to hear. Surely not the last time we will be with our loved ones. Not the last day of our life. Surely not the last "invitation" to obey the gospel and get right with God. But how can we be sure we aren't right now coming to the last of everything in life on earth? If your very next one were to be your very last one, what would you want it to be?

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Michael Shank

Of all of the conversion accounts in the New Testament, I believe none are as powerful, and as informative as that of Saul of Tarsus, who later became the Apostle Paul. Think about all of those we read about in the New Testament who became converts to Jesus Christ—the Eunuch, Cornelius, the Philippian jailor, etc. While their stories each have significance and interesting features, none of them resulted in the drastic, powerful change that Saul’s did.

Do you realize that Saul’s conversion is the only one we find in the entire Bible that is recorded from two different vantage points? In Acts 9, Paul’s conversion is written in third person by Dr. Luke; but in Acts 22 we get to read Paul’s own first-hand account of what happened (and he does it again for us in chapter 26).

Now we know from Colossians 4:14 that Luke accompanied Paul, so the idea that Luke wrote some of Acts from Paul’s point-of-view isn’t weird, but the fact that his conversion was recorded from two points of view is important: First, because this record is written about from two *inspired* vantage points. Second, because “by the mouth of two witnesses” is a thing confirmed.

To illustrate this point, note that at Christ’s transfiguration in Mark 9:4, “there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.” – 2 witnesses. Consider Romans 15:9 – through “mighty signs and wonders” the word was confirmed – 2 witnesses. Several other passages could be given which follow the same idea.

So the idea of dual confirmation is significant – it lends more credibility to Saul’s conversion, and gives us a fuller picture as well.

How Did Saul Become A Christian?

For a fun exercise, grab a piece of paper and make three columns on it. At the top of the first column on the left I want you to write **YOU**. Now, under the heading “YOU” I want you to write how you became a Christian.

At the top of the second column I want you to

write the word **PAUL**. Now under that heading I want you to write down how you think Saul became a Christian. (In the 31 years I’ve been asking this question, I’ve never had one person – outside of the church of Christ – tell me the *Bible’s* answer to how Paul became a Christian! Isn’t that remarkable?)

Write **BIBLE** at the top of the third column on your paper. Hang on to your paper while we look at Saul and his conversion.

Who Was Saul Who Became Paul?

- He was the young man who kept the garments of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58).
- He was a likely a member of the Sanhedrin Council (many Bible scholars believe this to be the case because he gave his vote for Christians to be killed—Acts 26:10).
- He spoke Hebrew (Acts 14:11; 22:2) and Greek (Acts 17:28) and Aramaic (not stated explicitly in the Scriptures, but given the surprise from people when he addressed them in Hebrew or in Greek, the logical conclusion is that there was another language they were used to hearing him talk with).
- He was a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia (Acts 21:39).
- He was a free-born Roman citizen (Acts 22:27-28).
- He was an Israelite of the seed of Abraham of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom. 11:1).
- He was brought up in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3).
- He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel in the Law of Moses, according to the perfect manner of the law of the father’s (Acts 22:3);
- He was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).
- He was zealous toward God (Acts 23:3).
- He persecuted “this Way” (Christianity),

Acts 22:4; the disciples, Acts 8:1 and the church, Acts 9:1;

- He was authorized by the chief priests and Sanhedrin Council via Jewish Court Authority to arrest, bind, and transport Christians back to Jerusalem to stand trial for blasphemy (Acts 22:5).
- He gave voice, or voted against the saints to have them put to death (Acts 26:10).
- He punished Christians who met in synagogues (Acts 26:11).
- He compelled Christians to blaspheme (Acts 26:11).
- He was exceeding mad against them (Acts 26:11).
- He chased and persecuted Christians into strange “remote” cities (Acts 26:11).
- Paul persecuted the church and “wasted” it (Gal. 1:13).
- He was a man of position in Judaism (Gal. 1:14).
- He did not believe that Jesus was Lord, and may have seen the miracles of Stephen, probably being one of the ones “of Cilicia” who disputed with Stephen (Acts 6:9; 22:3).
- If Paul was among those disputers, it would help explain why Jesus said to him in Acts 9:5, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks (goats)”

Saul Gets the Shock of His Life

It would be a good idea if you grabbed your Bible and read Acts 9:3-9 at this point.

Saul hears the voice asking him, “Saul, Saul – why are you persecuting me?”

We find out that Saul didn’t know who was asking the question, because he answered the question with a question, “Who art thou, Lord?” And the Lord identifies Himself (v.5), “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”

Notice Saul’s reaction in verse 6: he was “trembling and astonished.” He couldn’t believe it! It hit him fast, and it hit him hard:

All that I’ve been doing for God has been, in reality, against God.

Why, I thought I had the perfect relationship with God.

I thought I’d been doing right this entire time.

Friend, that’s what a lot of people think today. They think they’re following the faith of Jesus Christ when, in reality, what they’re doing is against God.

The very moment Jesus identified Himself, Saul became a believer. But was he “saved” at that moment? Stay with me just a bit longer, and we’ll find out!

Saul comes to believe in Jesus as the Christ, and notice that he didn’t make excuses – he didn’t defend his error. He simply asked, “What do you desire me to do?” Jesus, what do you want me to do to make this right?

Here’s a key point of the lesson (so pay attention) – look at the Lord’s response. Saul says, “What would you have me to do Lord?” and then Jesus answers.

Did Jesus say, “Ask me into your heart and you’ll be saved?” No? Then why would you tell someone that today?

Did Jesus say, “Say the Sinner’s Prayer?” No? Then why would you tell someone that today?

Did Jesus say, “Since you now believe in Me, all your sins are washed away?” No? Then why would you tell someone that today?

The Lord Jesus Christ’s response to Saul’s question, “What wilt thou have me to do?” is found in v.6, “Arise and go into the city [of Damascus] and there you shall be told what you must do.”

In other words, Jesus didn’t actually answer Saul’s question, but told him to go to Damascus and Jesus would make sure the answer was sent to him.

Jesus Sends the Answer

Ananias shows up in Acts 9:10-16. Now, before you get confused, this isn’t the dead Ananias from chapter 5—that one’s still dead and buried. This is a faithful disciple of Jesus (verse 10).

I find it quite interesting that all the Lord needed to tell Ananias, for him to know what to do with Saul, was to go find him. See, Ananias was a Christian—and he knew full well what it took for someone to become a true disciple of Jesus (that’s why Jesus chose him).

Verses 17 through 19 display Ananias’s obedience and the message from Jesus. Having the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, Ananias was able to lay hands on the blind Saul, restoring the still-

shocked Saul's sight. Then Saul arose and was baptized;

Now the question is this – *at what point were Saul's sins forgiven?* This is what we have to figure out. Why? Because a person is saved when their sins are forgiven, right? You can't separate the two.

When were Saul's sins forgiven? The truth is... Acts 9 doesn't tell us!

I can hear the screams now: *You spent all this time asking a question, and took us through a chapter that doesn't even answer it?!?* It's true that Acts 9 doesn't answer the question (but we needed to read it to get the picture of what was going on)—but Acts 22 does!

Paul Reveals The Answer

Turn to Acts 22, and look at verses 1-16.

- Saul believed on the road to Damascus—were his sins forgiven at that point?
- Saul repented on the road to Damascus—were his sins forgiven at that point?
- Saul prayed for three days in Damascus—were his sins forgiven at that point?
- Saul fasted for three days in Damascus—were his sins forgiven at that point?

Ananias sure didn't think so. And since Jesus is the one who hand-picked him for this mission, we know that Jesus didn't think so either! Saul wasn't saved when he believed (and boy did he ever believe!). Saul wasn't saved when he prayed (and if ever a prayer could save someone, surely the sincere, believing, fasting Saul would be that one!). Instead, Saul was told he wasn't yet saved—he still bore his own sins. Ananias's exact words were:

*Arise and be baptized and **wash away your sins**, calling on the name of the Lord!*

Grab your piece of paper, and write down under BIBLE “believe, repent, confess, baptism for remission of sins, Acts 2:38.”

Now, as you look at your sheet of paper, see if what you wrote under PAUL matches what we actually saw from Scripture. To have the answer from the Bible, you should have something like: “believed, confessed, repented, and was baptized.”

Now how about under YOU?

Most of you reading this have been baptized,

but were you baptized in order to wash away your sins?

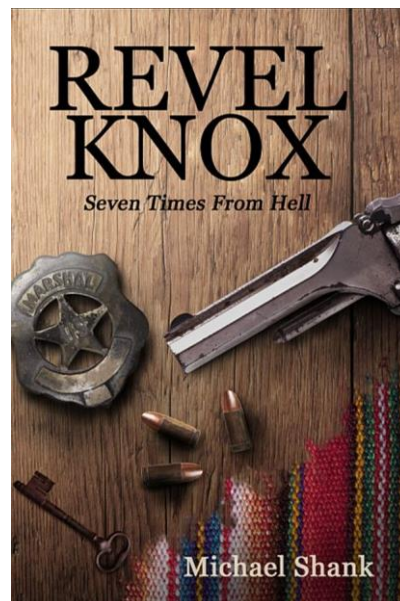
Maybe you did what I did – you were baptized because you thought your sins were already forgiven; an outward show of an inward change. You know what that is? That's an unscriptural baptism – the Lord never said to do that. Yes, you called out to Him (by a prayer—which was incapable of washing away Saul's sins), but you didn't call on Him in the way the Bible says to call on Him;

Matthew 7:21-23 says:

Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name cast out demons? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity.

And friend, if you were baptized for the wrong reason, baptized improperly, isn't that the same thing as not being baptized at all?

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Unsung Heroes: Ananias and Rhoda

Travis Anderson

I love these “minor” characters in the Bible, these “unsung heroes.” I hope you’ve been enjoying these looks into the lives of the lesser-known (to man) people who had a great impact on the lives of their fellow followers of Jesus. This time, we will look at two characters who appear only in the book of Acts. One is more familiar, due to his connection with a certain Saul of Tarsus, but the other one, not so much.

As always, my goal will be to examine these lesser known characters and see what characteristics they displayed and/or possessed that we as Christians should also have in our lives.

Ananias (Acts 19:10-19)

Ananias’ name means ‘the Lord is Gracious.’

He was a devout Jew (“a devout man according to the Law”) who believed in Jesus, but was also highly thought of by his Jewish community.

The Lord chose him, for whatever reason, to go find Saul, who had just had his ‘come to Jesus moment’ on his way to Damascus, where he had intended to round up any Christians he could find and have them tossed into jail.

Many say Ananias was a Messianic Jew,¹ that is, someone who believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but also maintained their Jewish culture and identity.

He didn’t tell Saul to toss all the Jewish things he learned, he just told him to add faith in Jesus to it.

Whatever the case was, he was a Jew who believed in Jesus and is called by both Luke (Acts 9) and Paul (Acts 22)—he was a faithful disciple,

¹ Messianic Jews continue to celebrate the Jewish festivals and feast days as prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., Passover, Day of Atonement, etc.) but they do it in a way that demonstrates how Yeshua has already fulfilled these Holy Days. Jews who now follow Yeshua the Messiah and understand that everything given in the Old Covenant was a “mere shadow” of the better things to come in the New.

which is what we are striving to be as well

What He Did

God spoke to Ananias and told him that Saul was going to be a special tool in God’s toolbox, but that he (Ananias) would play a role in forging that tool. Despite his hesitations and concerns about approaching Saul, he immediately went and did as God instructed him following their short conversation.

What We Can Learn From Him

Even though he was not anxious to do what God had asked of him, **he immediately made himself the vessel God needed** to accomplish his plan. This matches well with 2 Tim. 1:7. God does not make our fears and anxieties go away, but instead gives us the strength to overcome them. God does not make the tough times in our life disappear, but instead gives us the armor of God to stand firm in the face of tough times.

There are things in our Christian walk that are not easy, and might scare us or make us intimidated, but knowing that these are the tasks God has given us, knowing we *can* do them should give us the courage to step forward and *do them*.

The instructions Ananias received would not make any sense from a purely human view point. ‘*You want me to go find the guy that is throwing people in jail for talking about you, and you want me to go talk about you to him?!?*’ But with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

There are many things about God’s plan that we do not understand and can’t figure out, but we are called to GO, and that is what we must do to be faithful to God.

I am sure Ananias had no clue how this was going to turn out. But he trusted in God and did it anyways. Had Ananias refused to go to Saul, Christianity would look a little different today. I know God would have accomplished his will anyways, but look at how much one good one man did just

by going and not only teaching Saul what he should do, but encouraging him as a brother.

Just imagine how different your congregation would look if one or two of your members had not become Christians, or not raised godly children. Somewhere along the line, someone took the time to teach them about Jesus and encourage them along their walk with God. Someone was their Ananias, their Barnabas, and because of that, perhaps, the number of faithful Christians in your congregation is much higher.

Other than Luke's account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9 and Paul's retelling of his conversation in Acts 22, we know nothing of this man or what he may have done. But what we do know is powerful, and a good example of the results of doing as God has instructed us

Rhoda (Acts 12:1-5, 12-17)

Rhoda was a servant girl in the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was sometimes called Mark. One of the things we tend to gloss over is how wealthy Mary and her family must have been. She had servants—well, at least one. Her house was a common meeting place for at least part of the Jerusalem church. The home had an outer gate, or a gateway, and the rest of the people were far enough back in the house that it seems there were out of earshot of the gate.

In Jerusalem, the only Jewish people who would have had such homes would have been well-to-do priests, and many of them lived in what was called the Upper City. While Scripture doesn't talk about such things, this area of town would not have been far from the temple, which was right next to the fortress of Antonia, which would have been where Peter was probably being held.

Obviously everyone there would have been quite shaken.

James had just been killed.

Peter had been thrown in prison, and they probably assumed a similar fate awaited him as well.

Not only him, but anyone who stood for Christ—including them. They were gathered together to pray.

It appears that Rhoda was a part of this congregation, for she recognizes Peter by his voice. But even if not, look at what the believers were doing. Sure they were scared, but how did they handle it?

They prayed.

They were together.

They weren't scattered through the city wondering what to do.

They weren't complaining about the government, but simply praying to their God to be with Peter.

Peter and John had just been released from prison after standing before the Sanhedrin and not backing down concerning their teaching. But before they were released, they had been beaten for good measure and went to the church and told them what had happened to them.

This was ten or so years prior to the events we read about in Acts 12, but it's highly likely that some of those we read about in Acts 4 are here in Acts 12, since it is the same town (Jerusalem) and both times when Peter is released from prison he finds support in his fellow believers.

Anyways, back to Acts 12, as they are praying there is a knock, and Rhoda the servant girl (how old we have no clue, any age under 40 probably) answers it. She becomes so excited at the sound of Peter's voice she runs off to tell the rest of them that Peter is here...without opening the door and actually letting Peter in.

Given how close they may have been to the fortress, they might have thought that a knock of the door would mean Herod's soldiers had arrived to arrest more believers.

They don't even believe Rhoda when she tells them Peter is there. Instead, they think it's his angel (v. 15). This passage gives us a little glimpse into some of the Jewish beliefs on angels. Sadducees didn't believe in angels (or the resurrection either) but many Pharisees believed in angels, and that each person had their own guardian angel that would assume the form of the person they were guarding over.² Hence why the people though Rhoda had actually seen an angel, or more accurately, Peter's guardian angel.

Eventually she convinces them that it is indeed Peter outside (either that or she pesters them until they decide to humor her) and they go to the gate

² See almost every prominent commentary on Acts from Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes to Burton Coffman and J.W. McGarvey. Most are quick to point out that just because the Jews *believed* this, it doesn't mean that they were *right* to believe this.—Editor.

and find the Apostle they had assumed was in prison and possibly dead.

Lessons to Learn:

Sometimes the answers to our prayers are right in front of us, and we just need to look, or adjust our way of thinking. Think about this almost comical scene: Many people were praying earnestly for Peter (contemplate James 5:16 as you think about this). They prayed day and night, possibly for the entire week he was in prison. And their prayers were most likely centered on his release from prison. *And here is the exact answer to their prayers, literally knocking on their door*, and when they are told that he is knocking on their door, no one initially has the faith to believe that God has answered their prayers!

Could it be that sometimes, we are like that? Sometimes we are so serious about a solution that we fail to realize when the solution is knocking on our door. Granted, it will not always be obvious, but often times we think we know how God should answer our prayers, and then that is all we look for.

Sometimes we have to be persistent when we teach people. I bet you could ask any teacher or parent, and they would tell you that you just might need to say something more than once to get students or kids to understand what they are saying. Teaching people about Jesus is the same way.

I am in no way advocating that you be pushy, but you can't just talk to someone about Christ once and when they don't respond how you would like, never try again. We don't take that approach with our loved ones.

Or how about when talking to people who have fallen away from the church? Do we just mention once that we miss them at church and that is where they need to be, or do we keep at it like Rhoda did? She really wanted the saints there in the house to know the truth of the situation, so she persisted. If we don't persist in talking to those who have fallen away, do we really think it is that serious?

Or if we mentioned church or Jesus to a friend or family member 10 years ago, but never again even though we see them regularly, do we really think it is that serious?

We need to be like Rhoda! No, I am not advo-

cating we be pushy and forceful. Rhoda didn't drag anyone to the door to see Peter, but she stayed with it until they knew what she knew: That God had answered their prayers and that Peter was alive and well!

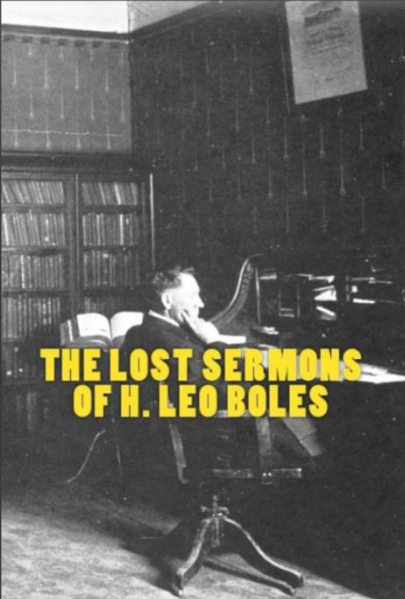
We need to stay with our efforts to show the love of Christ to others until they know what we know: God desires that all men come to know him, his son, his word, and his salvation.

Conclusion

In these two small stories we find a few great lessons that would make us all better disciples. God can use us when we do as he asks, even when we don't quite understand why. Small acts of instruction and encouragement can have a great impact on more people than you will ever know.

There is great power in praying together as a church, but we can also become blinded to the very answer to our prayers if we are not looking for God's answer with an open mind.

Persistence pays off, and if it is important enough to us, we will be persistent.



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IN THE GARDEN:

“REMOVE THIS CUP”

Gantt Carter

Are you afraid of dying? Are you scared of the possible pain connected to your death? It seems that most of the human race has always been plagued by the fear of death. One big problem with this fear is that it combines a number of other great fears: fear of the unknown, fear of pain, fear of being forgotten, and the fear of meaninglessness, etc. Even with the hope of eternal life, many Christians find themselves fearing and apprehensively awaiting their demise. Life is priceless, and the very concept of losing life itself can often be terrifying.

Please read the following sections of Holy Writ:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’ And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; stay here, and watch with Me.’ And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’ And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words

again. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand’ (Matthew 26:36-46).

And He came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him. And when He came to the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’ And He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed saying, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.’ And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and He said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation’ (Luke 22:39-46; cf. Mark 14:32-42).

Certainly, the entire garden scene is one of the most touching moments recorded for us from the life of our Savior. Reading these accounts is easily enough to dampen the eyes. It was a time when, in His own words, He was “very sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:34). Let us consider an important question concerning the prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane.

What did our Master mean when He prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”?

We must not ever take the words of Jesus lightly, and these words are definitely not an exception. I will now give three interpretations of this prayer for your careful consideration.

Afraid of Death?

Was Jesus afraid of dying? From my experience, this is a popular way many explain the repeated prayers of Jesus in the garden. It is suggested that Jesus began to be fearful or anxious about His upcoming suffering, and that His resolve began to waver. I cannot hold to this view for a number of reasons.

A Divine Plan

His coming and His death was an eternal plan (Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28; 1 Peter 1:19-20). It was as if He had been slain since the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). His life between His birth and death is very important, but the fact is that He came to this Earth in order to die on the hill of Calvary. Why would Jesus ever even begin to change His mind about going to the cross? Are we to conclude that He was reactionary and fickle? Is that consistent with how Deity is set forth throughout the Scriptures?

Jesus spoke plainly to His disciples about His suffering and death (see Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; Mark 10:32-33; Luke 9:21-23 and others). Luke tells us of how “He set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51), and He clearly knew what awaited Him in the city. There is not even a hint of hesitation or regret in any of this. Jesus knew “all that would happen to Him” during His betrayal, arrest, and suffering (John 18:4).

As He participated in the Feast of the Passover with His disciples, He makes clear references to His betrayal (John 13:21-30) and to the disciples denial (John 13:36-38). Just before entering Gethsemane, Matthew records Him telling the disciples about the events that were about to follow (Matthew 26:30-35; cf. 36-46). He quotes Zechariah on the striking of the shepherd and the scattering of His sheep (v. 31). “But,” He explains, “after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee” (v. 32). Not only His suffering, but also the secure fact of His vindication was obviously on His mind that night.

After He refers to His death and resurrection (John 12:23-24), Jesus explains,

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27-28a). Then John tells us that a voice came from heaven saying, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

This exchange occurs at the beginning of the Passover week. He knows that He is less than a week away from His suffering, but He says that He cannot ask the Father to save Him from this event.

Was He looking forward to the pain and cruelty? Of course not. But that does not mean He was shying away from it or hesitant about it. How could He say that He would not ask to be spared from the cross, but then make that very request less than a week later?

I am sure you probably recall how Peter removed an ear from a servant named Malchus at the arrest of Jesus. But do you remember what John records Jesus saying to Peter? “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11; cf. Matthew 20:22-23). How do we reconcile these words with His previous prayer, if we interpret His prayer as a request to not suffer? Is the same cup being referenced in both settings? I think not.

Forced to Die?

Did the Father force Jesus to go to the cross? Or did Jesus willingly suffer and die for us? Some would have us believe that in the garden Jesus did not want to continue with the plan, but that the Father made Him go through with it all anyway.

What say the Scriptures?

*I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but **I lay it down of My own accord**. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This*

charge I have received from my Father (John 10:14-18).

Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He was going to be killed by the Jews, and declared that such would never happen to Him. How did Jesus respond to His apostle?

But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men (Matthew 16:23).

So did He have a moment of weakness? Was He losing His resolve? Was He afraid of the pain? Did He change His mind? Is it just His humanity coming forth? I kindly submit that all of this is quite foreign to the Jesus presented by the gospel writers, and quite inconsistent with the Bible as a whole.

A "Human Side"?

Some suggest that the prayers in the garden are explained by realizing that Jesus possessed (or possesses) both a "Divine side" and a "human side". Where does the word of God support such a concept of Jesus being a two-sided person? Did He really have two personalities? Should we conclude that Jesus has a split personality? So if the human side was afraid of death, does that mean the Divine side was not afraid at the same time?

Please do not misunderstand me. I firmly and gladly believe that Jesus was and is fully Divine. I am also just as certain that He was and is fully human. As John writes, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a; cf. Colossians 2:9). The incarnation is a mystery; a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend, not that we can fully comprehend anything about Deity. Even if our understanding of the incarnation is limited, we are still left with no proper reason to think that He had two different sides.

The King Afraid of Mortality?

As we noted earlier, during the garden scene, Jesus was "very sorrowful, even to death" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 26:38). Matthew observes that, "He began to be sorrowful and troubled" (Matthew 26:37). "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke

22:44). The Hebrew writer tells us that He prayed with "loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Why was He so filled with sorrow? Was He sorry to die for us? Why would the Messiah be afraid of death, when He is the very one who came to free us from the fear of death?

Consider the countless holy ones who have been tortured and murdered in cruel fashions over the centuries (cf. Hebrews 11:35-38). Some of them have even been scourged and crucified themselves. Many of these people courageously faced their fate as they sang praises to Deity or quoted Scriptures. Do you think that the Creator of the entire universe, that the King of kings was afraid of the Jews or the Romans? Was the Master of life and death scared of dying?

Remember, Jesus is "the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Spiritual Death?

But the argument is put forth that Jesus was not upset because of the suffering/death, but because He was about to bear the weight of all the sins of the world on His shoulders. Or still others say it was knowing He was about to be separated from His Father that caused Him to want to "back out," so to speak. However, I cannot find real support for these commonly held beliefs in the Scriptures. Penal substitutionary atonement¹ is far from the only view on His death. Of course, a deeper look at this topic is best left for a separate study. But for now, here are a few thoughts for your careful consideration:

Jesus was the perfect and spotless Lamb of Deity (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Hebrews 7:26-28; 9:11-14). Sin is an action/behavior, and not some kind of commodity that can be transferred or passed on to another (cf. Ezekiel 18:20). Jesus never committed a solitary sin in all roughly 33 years of His time on this ball of dust (Hebrews 4:15-16; Matthew 4:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21). But some even believe that He died a spiritual death on the cross...that He literally became sin. One man writes,

¹ The idea that Jesus willingly took the punishment for sin in place of humanity, thus satisfying the wrath of God against sin.—Editor.

In the cup, Jesus saw the crushing reality of separation from His Father. About to be made the object of His Father's wrath, He felt the coming rejection. He wouldn't have been human if He hadn't asked about the unavoidability of the cup" (jamesmacdonald.com/blog/it-was-all-in-the-cup/).

Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1 from the cross to further demonstrate that He was the Messiah of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. That very song states:

For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and He has not hidden His face from Him, but has heard, when He cried to Him (Psalm 22:24).

Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11a).

I submit that Jesus was the sinless Lamb of God, and that He never ceased to be that in the slightest sense. If He ceased to be the sinless Son of God, then how could He have remained the perfect sacrifice?

The Passover Solution?

There is a second explanation that connects the prayer(s) of Jesus in the garden to the Passover Feast of the Jews. It is argued that Jesus was not actually saying, "I do not want to drink this cup", but "I want to drink it fully." As the cup was passed at the feast, one would have to drink deeply before exclaiming, "let this cup pass."

In talking about the bitter contents at the bottom of the cup and arguing for this view, one writer states,

Jesus was not asking God to let Him avoid the cup, but was asking to let Him take on as much of it as He possibly could, and if possible, if it was God's will, to let Him drink every single drop, down the bitter end (redeeminggod.com/let-this-cup-pass-did-jesus-change-his-mind/).

Some think that Jesus spoke in Hebrew on the night of His arrest, and that He would have used the term *abar*, or "pass through" (cf. Exodus 12:12, 23). But we cannot know that He was speaking in Hebrew, and even then we cannot be positive that He used *abar*. In addition, this argu-

ment is based solely upon Matthew's use of *parerchomai*, and does not really take into account the way the other writers use *paraphero* (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

Parerchomai refers to passing by or rendering void (Strong's Concordance, online). It is employed 30 different times by the Holy Spirit. For example, it is used twice in the familiar Matthew 5:18, and translated as "pass" or "pass away."

Paraphero is about carrying away, removing, or turning aside (Strong's Concordance, online). It is only used two other times in the New Covenant writings (see Hebrews 13:9 and James 1:12).

But if this view of His prayer were true, why would Jesus need to make such a request? Instead of saying that Jesus did not want to go through with His suffering, this position submits that the hesitation was with the Father instead. I submit this stance causes many of the same exegetical and theological difficulties we discussed above.

Again, those who hold to this view claim that the Father was waning because He did not want to pour out His wrath on His beloved Son, that He was beginning to hesitate in view of being spiritually separated from Jesus. This too, we have basically addressed above, and have shown the Biblical inconsistencies of this perspective.

What Did He mean?

What did our Master mean when He prayed through the tears, "remove this cup from Me"? My basic answer: This I do not know, for the Bible does not tell me so. We need to be very careful of even making "educated guesses" concerning the words and actions of Deity. I reverently suggest one possible explanation:

His Prayer Was Heard?

The writer of the inspired letter to the Hebrew Christians writes,

In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence (Hebrews 5:7).

Most would agree that this verse refers to the prayers of Jesus in the garden on that sorrowful night. The text states that the Father heard or listened to His prayer because of His fear/reverence. What does that mean? Did not the Father give at-

tention to every prayer Jesus ever lifted up to Him? Does this mean that His prayer was granted (cf. Luke 22:43)? If so, that certainly changes the way we would interpret the “cup” Jesus wanted to be removed from Him.

Some dismiss this thought because Jesus was delivered from death by means of His resurrection three days later, but there seems to be something more here. His resurrection was a clear part of the plan, and not something Jesus needed to pray for.

It is interesting that one English translation says, “He was delivered from the terror from which He shrank” (Weymouth New Testament). Young’s Literal Translation translates the entire verse in this way:

“who in the days of his flesh both prayers and supplications unto Him who was able to save him from death—with strong crying and tears—having offered up, and having been heard in respect to that which he feared.”

It really was a night of sorrow that night just outside Jerusalem. Even the disciples were sleeping due to their sorrow (Luke 22:45). Sleep can be a side-effect of extreme grief and mental anguish.

Could it be that Jesus was literally rescued from death in the garden? Take some time and deeply contemplate the meaning of these words: “He began to be sorrowful and troubled.” “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” “He prayed that...the hour might pass from Him.” “Could you not watch one hour”? “And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him.” “And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

It seems that, instead of asking to not go to the cross, He is actually asking to not die *now*, in the garden, so He could die on the cross as the sin-offering. At least worthy of some deep thought.

But Why Was He So Sad?

What kind of sorrow would bring one to the point of death? If Jesus was not afraid of death or what was going to happen directly to Himself, then what had Him so disturbed in the garden? Consider the character of Jesus throughout His life; He is the epitome of selflessness and compassion (cf. Philippians 2:5-8; 2 Corinthians 8:9; and

many others). It appears the mind and the life of our Messiah was devoted to His Father and to His people (see Luke 2:49; John 4:34; 8:29; Luke 19:10; John 13:1; etc.).

Therefore, it is Biblically consistent and logical to conclude that Jesus’ sorrow in the garden was either about His beloved Father’s glory or about His beloved creation, or likely both. I humbly suggest that His sorrow was so immense, for His love was/is so immense!

So below is a list of a few (and I am sure there are more) possible reasons for His deep emotional pain in the Olive groves:

- The crown and glory of God’s creation was about to repeatedly blaspheme in the most horrible fashion, and brutally torture and murder God clothed in flesh. The glory of God would be ransacked and trampled in the most horrid way. Maybe there is sadness in His heart and voice as He asks, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:52-53).
- He had come to His own (the Jews—His spiritual creation, humanity—His physical creation), and they had rejected Him. His arrest, trials, and crucifixion was the zenith of that rejection (see John 1:10-11 and others). “And when He drew near and saw the city, he wept over it...” (Luke 19:41).
- Jesus loved Judas, and his betrayal certainly grieved His heart. “After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in His spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me’” (John 13:21). Instead of sarcasm, it just might be that His spirit is tinged with grief as He says, “Friend, do what you have come to do” (Matthew 26:50), and as He asks, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48).
- Similarly, knowing that Peter (along with the others) was about to deny Him had to be utterly heartbreaking for the Lord of life and love. It seems only right that there was a salty moisture in His eyes, and not bitter-

ness as “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61).

- Jesus knew that the disciples were going to deny Him, but that they would also be heartbroken as they watched their gentle Master so terribly abused and cruelly put to death. “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20). “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1).

The Savior’s overbearing sadness in the garden was likely caused by a combination of all the burdens put forth above. We know that His focus was on others as He talked with His disciples in the upper room (John 13-16), and as He prayed His High Priestly prayer (John 17). Have you ever noticed how many times we find Him showing compassion for others during the most physically painful time of His life? He heals Malchus, the servant of His arch-enemy (Luke 22:51). The Lord is mindful of the physical pain and injury of the servant. He tells the Jewish women to stop grieving for Him, and to begin preparing for their own troubles (Luke 22:27-31). (But are we to believe that He is so sad about His own plight that He prays for a way out?) He has compassion on the emotional and physical suffering these women are soon to endure (in about 40 years).

His next recorded prayer, after leaving the garden, is, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 22:34). Here we find Him giving attention to the spiritual ignorance of the Romans. He then takes the time to grant a powerful promise to a thief, who only just left the side of the blasphemers. He gives consideration to the spiritual condition of the thief. Of course, His words to the women were after He was too weak to carry His own cross-beam, and the last two expressions would have come through fleeting breaths.

If our King was so mindful of the plight of others during this entire process, then why ought we to conclude that His mind was focused on His own future plight as He prays, “let this cup pass

from Me”? Since we are not specifically told what the cup was in His prayer, then why would we conclude it to be something that would be inconsistent (at best) with the rest of what is revealed about Him and the events of that weekend?

Summary Thoughts

While I may not be able to fully say what Jesus meant by His prayer, I can know some things that He certainly did not mean. I am not convinced that He was afraid of physical death. I am not persuaded that He was even going to die spiritually. I am not convinced that the Father was even beginning to change His mind about the sacrifice of Jesus. I do know that (for a number of reasons) His heart was flooded with grief, and that He was approaching death in the garden (before He could be sacrificed on a cross). There is good reason to think that His prayer was granted. Oh, how much He loves us!

*He was despised and forsaken by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.
Surely He has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted
(Isaiah 53:3-4).*

Reading List/Works Cited

<http://biblehub.com/strongs.htm>
<http://www.biblestudy.org/basicart/let-this-cup-pass-from-me.html>
<https://redeeminggod.com/let-this-cup-pass-did-jesus-change-his-mind/>
<http://robertwells.tripod.com/separation.html>

Unless otherwise noted, all the quotations from Scripture are taken from the English Standard Version. Any deviation from the ESV is my own personal translation.

SIMON THE ZEALOT

Bradley S. Cobb

Beyond his name and epitaphs, we know nothing about Simon except that he was an apostle. But, there is something to be said for the epitaphs themselves.

Simon the Canaanite

Most writers seem to think that the descriptive name “Canaanite” or “Cananaean”¹ is a political term instead of a geographical term.² It seems more likely that it is *both*. Canaan was the name of the Promised Land (Exodus 6:4; Leviticus 25:38; Acts 13:19), which was given to the Jews by God as their inheritance. But by the time of Jesus, the Jews were ruled over by the Romans. So, while the Jews still *lived* in Canaan, they certainly didn’t feel like it was *theirs alone*. But there were Jewish patriots, nationalists, who wanted to re-take control over their Promised Land—Canaan. They were called “Canaanites,” or, as Luke describes them, “Zealots.” They were very “conspicuous for their fierce advocacy of the Mosaic ritual.”³

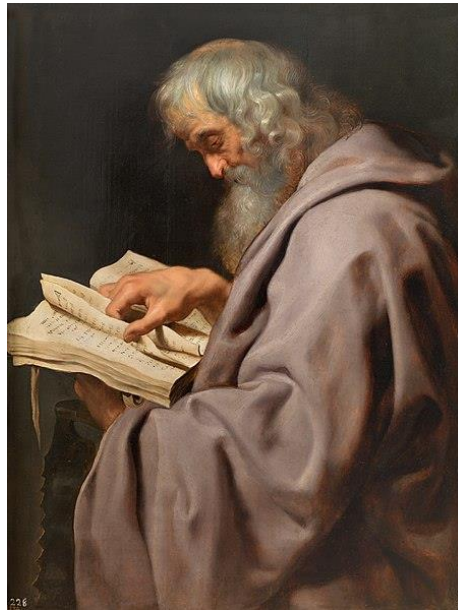
The Cananaeans or Zealots were a sect founded by Judas of Gamala, who headed the opposition to the census of Quirinius (AD 6 or 7). They bitterly resented the domination of Rome, and would fain have hastened by the sword the fulfilment of the Messianic hope. During the great rebellion

*and the siege of Jerusalem, which ended in its destruction (AD 70), their fanaticism made them terrible opponents, not only to the Romans, but to other factions amongst their own countrymen.*⁴

Josephus, however, describes the Zealots who brought the wrath of Rome upon the Jews as a collection of criminals who overthrew the high priest, murdered prominent men, and falsely accused them of consorting with Rome. This group of people took upon themselves the name “Zealots,” as though they were zealous of the Law, but were really just zealous of murder and mayhem.⁵ This being the case, the connection between the Zealots of Jesus’ day and the Zealots of 40 years later may be one of name only.

Other Facts about Simon

Simon was a disciple of Jesus Christ who, one morning, was called to meet the Lord on a mountain. That day, Jesus selected twelve men for a special task—and Simon was one of those men chosen.⁶ He was given miraculous abilities to heal the sick and to cast out demons, which he used when he was sent out on the so-called “limited commission.”⁷ On that apostolic mission, Jesus sent them



¹ Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:13. “Canaanite” (KJV), “Cananaean” (ASV).

² See the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Simon the Cananaean.”

³ McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 9, page 754.

⁴ James Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, “Cananaean.”

⁵ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 3, Paragraphs 9-13. The Zealots defiled the sanctuary in the temple and had no regard for human life or the Law of Moses.

⁶ Luke 6:12-16.

⁷ Matthew 10:1-4. The phrase “limited commission” is used because Jesus sent them exclusively to the Jews (Matthew 10:5-6), whereas after the resurrection He sent them to

out “two by two,” or in pairs.⁸ When Matthew records this event, he doesn’t say “two by two,” but he does group the apostles into pairs when he lists them:

- “Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother”
- “James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother”
- “Philip and Bartholomew”
- “Thomas and Matthew the publican”
- “James, the son of Alphaeus, and Leb-Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus”
- “Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”⁹

It seems, therefore, that when Simon was sent out on the limited commission, his preaching partner was none other than Judas Iscariot himself!¹⁰

Simon witnessed many miracles of Jesus, but it still wasn’t enough to keep him from abandoning Jesus when Judas showed up with soldiers to arrest Him.¹¹ He ran away, and after learning that Jesus was dead, he was sad, but also scared that the Jews might come after him as well. So, when he met with the other apostles that Sunday, the doors were shut tight. The joy, surprise, and

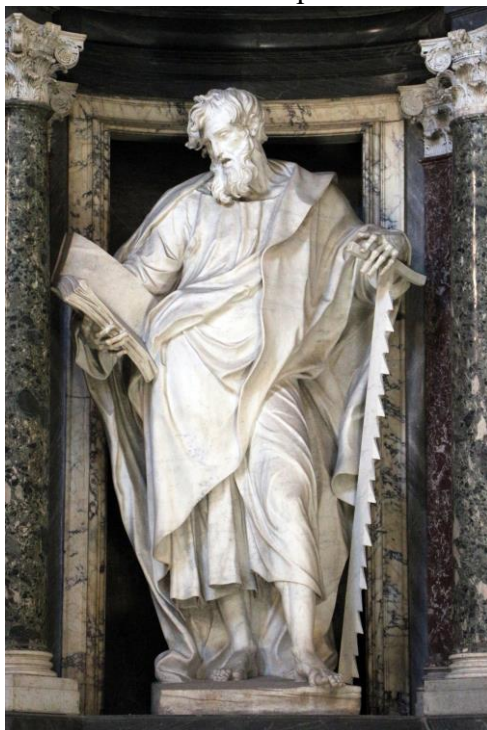
excitement must have been incredible when Jesus—very much alive—appeared in the middle of the room. Soon after that event, Simon was one of the ones who tracked down Thomas to share the news of the resurrection.¹²

Simon spent a large portion of the next month in the company of the resurrected Lord, trying to soak in everything that Jesus had to say to them. When He ascended into heaven, Simon was one of the ones staring up into the clouds. Just a few days later, Simon was in a room with the rest of the apostles when it sounded like a tornado blew through, and he began to speak the wonderful works of God in another language.¹³

After baptizing people on Pentecost, Simon also helped distribute money to the needy saints who were in Jerusalem,¹⁴ and also helped in ordaining “the seven” who would take a more hands-on role in caring for the Grecian widows.¹⁵ He remained in Jerusalem after the persecution by Saul of Tarsus began, and is again seen in Jerusalem some years later in regards to the circumcision controversy among Gentile converts.¹⁶

However, Simon didn’t stay in Jerusalem the rest of his life.

He had received a commission from Jesus Christ to “go into all the world” and to “teach all nations.”¹⁷ He would have obeyed his Lord’s command and went about working as a missionary. He died as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, and his name is on the foundation of the holy city, New Jerusalem.¹⁸ That much, we can know for certain.



“all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19), earning the latter the name “the Great Commission.”

⁸ Mark 6:7; compare Mark 6:7-13 with Matthew 10:1-42 for evidence that these are parallel.

⁹ Matthew 10:2-4.

¹⁰ This makes for some interesting study, since some believe “Iscariot” could be a reference to an assassin group whose name, *Sicarii*, translated, means “dagger bearers.” They, like the Zealots, were very interested in overthrowing the Roman government, but instead of being bold about it, they discretely murdered high-ranking officials in crowds, and were gone before anyone realized what had happened.

¹¹ Matthew 26:56

¹² See John 20.

¹³ These events can be found in the first two chapters of Acts.

¹⁴ Acts 4:32-35.

¹⁵ Acts 6:1-6. This group is referred to as “the seven” in Acts 21:8.

¹⁶ Acts 8:1; Acts 15.

¹⁷ Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁸ Revelation 21:14.

Traditions about Simon the Zealot

The apocryphal work, *The Genealogies of the Twelve Apostles*, identifies Simon as Nathanael, and claims he is from the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁹ Catholic Church tradition erroneously states that he is one of the “brethren of the Lord” mentioned in Mark 6:3, and that his father is Cleopas/Alphaeus.²⁰

According to one writing, his work was among the Samaritans,²¹ after which he returned to Jerusalem to lead the church there following the death of James, the brother of the Lord,²² though this appears to be an instance of confusing people with the same name.²³ A different tradition says he preached in “Egypt, Cyrene, and Mauritania.”²⁴

One tradition says that he was taken by the Jews in Jerusalem and crucified, but that they also scourged him (i.e., beat him with skin-tearing

whips) the whole time he was on the cross until he died.²⁵ In many statues, he is standing with a saw, a reference to another tradition in which he was sawn in half in Persia.²⁶ And still others claim he was put to death in his second missionary trip to Britain.²⁷

²⁵ Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, Vol.2, page 77.

The problem with this is that this same writing also claims that Simon lived to be 120 years old, and that he died under the rule of Trajan—at which time Jerusalem had already been destroyed and the Jews were forbidden to enter that area any longer. McClintock and Strong reference “an annotation preserved in an original copy of the *Apostolical Constitutions* (viii, 27), [where Simon is said] to have been crucified in Judaea in the reign of Domitian.”

²⁶ <http://catholicsaints.info/saint-simon-the-apostle/>

²⁷ Jowett, George F., *Drama of the Lost Disciples*, (Covenant, 1988) p. 159. The author of this book, it should be noted, is a Zionist—someone who believes that the British (and by extension, a large portion of Americans) are the “lost ten tribes” of Israel—and thus has a theological bias that he is seeking to justify and bolster. He also claims that the church was planted and headquartered in England just three years after the crucifixion. His historical research and evidence appears to be sorely lacking.

¹⁹ See Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, page 50.

²⁰ See the previous chapter on James, the son of Alphaeus, for a fuller description of this issue and for the evidence showing it is false. Suffice it to say, Jesus had already chosen His twelve apostles prior to John’s saying that His “brethren” still didn’t believe in Him (John 6:67-7:5). Therefore, Simon the apostle cannot be the same as Simon the brother of the Lord.

²¹ See “The Preaching of Simon, the Son of Cleopas,” in Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, pages 70-74. This tradition, while ancient, contains some obvious Catholic influence, including the ordination of “priests” and a “bishop” over the church in a certain city.

²² See “The Martyrdom of Simon, the Son of Clopas,” in Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, Vol. 2, page 75. This, like the other tradition, is highly suspect because it is also said that he commanded “churches to be built” and named one of them after the virgin Mary. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, chapter 11, and Book 4, chapter 22) quotes Hegesippus in saying that a man named Simon (the son of Cleopas) succeeded James in Jerusalem, though these are certainly not the same men (Eusebius himself makes a distinction between the apostles and the brethren of the Lord in Book 3, chapter 11, of the same work). The Simon described by Hegesippus was the leader of the Ebionites, a Jewish sect which completely rejected the apostle Paul and only used Matthew’s gospel—they also rejected the possibility that Gentiles could be right with the Lord. Certainly no one could believe that this group was led by one of the apostles.

²³ See the previous footnote for more information, as well as McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia* under “Simon (10)” and the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Ebionism.”

²⁴ McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 9, page 754.

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The Destruction of Nineveh

by Richard Mansel



The Assyrian capital of Nineveh was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. It was a place of splendor, learning, and shocking brutality. “For more than two hundred years Nineveh had been the capital and curse of Western Asia.”¹

God called the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach the word of the Lord (Jonah 1:2). He rejected that counsel and ran the other way, most likely, out of fear. Jonah’s trepidation wasn’t without reason. The Assyrians were among the most

feared people of the ancient world. Their list of atrocities isn’t for the faint of heart.

God compelled Jonah to face his fears, and Nineveh repented at his preaching (Jonah 3:1-10). God had blessed them with a chance at forgiveness. In time, though, evil returned and their future became tinged in black.

Nineveh

Nineveh was estimated to have around 100,000 residents.² “The world’s trade routes converged at Nineveh, so her streets were filled with a con-

¹ John Phillips, “Exploring the Minor Prophets” in the John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 183.

² Ibid., 140.

glomerate of people.”³ The city was fortified by enormous walls. “The perimeter of the city was about 50 miles and the ‘fortifications were 50 feet thick and 160 feet high.”⁴

“This metropolis was resplendent with terraces and storied palaces, arsenals and barracks, libraries and temples.”⁵ The city contained a marble House of Tributes that included the magnificent wealth they had captured from their battles.

Moreover, King Assurbanipal built a huge library and sought out all the books he could find to fill the shelves.⁶ Their educational goals combined with the beauty and splendor of the city exhibit a marked contrast to their brutality.

The Brutality of the Assyrians

We could fill several pages detailing the horrors of the Assyrians.⁷ They fought with great fierceness and kept meticulous records of their exploits. It wasn’t good enough just to kill. They spread fear to survivors and any cities in their path by slaughtering their victims.

Dismemberment on display was their calling card.

*“The initial blood bath when a city was sacked was followed by fiendish cruelty inflicted on the leading men. Some had their tongues torn out by the roots. Others were flayed alive; their skins were stretched out on the city walls to terrify any who might entertain ideas of rebellion.”*⁸

Anyone would be justified in being terrified of the Assyrians. And with their power, wealth, and written records, the legend rose in stature as it was passed around.

Prophecy of Doom

God’s wrath is unmatched. No human in their brutality can withstand his power. He created the universe with a thought and can end it with the same ease. The price of evil comes with a reckoning.

God gave Nahum a prophecy that would put an end to the savagery of the Assyrians. And it would be a shocking one.

*The demise of Nineveh was so important because it marked the end of the Assyrian Empire, which at its height stretched from Egypt in the west to Persia in the east and included most of Anatolia, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula.*⁹

“Nahum was given the assignment to preach the downfall of Nineveh. A century earlier Jonah would gladly have given his life for the task.”¹⁰ But God acts in His own time.

We have a great deal of evidence for the destruction of Nineveh in addition to the book of Nahum. We have Babylonian art, the ancient Fall of Nineveh Chronicle, and the first century account of Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus.

*Prior to the beginning of the twentieth century, commentators discussed the date for the fall of Nineveh. The possibilities for this event ranged from 716 to 709 BC. In 1923, C.J. Gadd published a tablet from Babylon in the possession of the British Museum. The tablet was called the “Babylonian Chronicles” and it covered the years 616–609 BC, or the tenth to the 17th years of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon. The annals place the fall of Nineveh in the 14th year of his reign, the year 612 BC. This event provides the student of history with an absolute chronological peg for Biblical and Assyrian history.”*¹¹

Nahum’s prophecy minces no words. “Nahum’s text is brutally frank, even terrifying, through the first six verses.”¹²

It begins, “God is jealous, and the Lord avenges” (Nahum 1:2).¹³ He says in the next verse, “The

³ Ibid., 183.

⁴ Charles Seignobos, “The World Of Babylon.” Translated by David Macrae. (New York: Leon Amiel, 1975). 39.

⁵ Phillips, 138.

⁶ <https://www.livius.org/articles/place/assyria/>

⁷ Seignobos, pages 39-44.

⁸ Phillips, 185.

⁹ https://dailyhistory.org/How_Did_the_Ancient_City_of_Nineveh_Fall%3F

¹⁰ Phillips, 185.

¹¹ <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/divided-kingdom/2744-nahum-nineveh-and-those-nasty-assyrians?highlight=W5ldmVoliwibmluZXZlaCdZIl0>

¹² Kenneth L. Barker, Waylon Bailey, “Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah” in the New American Commentary Series, Volume 20 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 177.

¹³ All Scripture references are from the New King James

Lord has His way” (1:3). And the writer asks, “Who can stand before His indignation?” (1:6).

O.P. Robertson wrote:

*God will not wait until the enemy degenerates into a weakened state before initiating calamity. Even while they are undiminished in strength, full of arrogant self-confidence, God shall level them to the ground.*¹⁴

God does what no human could have done and completely annihilates the most powerful force in that part of the world. The prophecy is exact and extremely precise. The following is a summary:

*First, it would happen when they are drunken like drunkards. Second, Nineveh’s valiant warriors would be bathed in blood. Third they would seek refuge inside the clay walls of Nineveh and be put under siege. Fourth, God was going to bring an overflowing flood from the rivers to bring down the great city. Fifth, fire would devour the city. Sixth, the Assyrian generals and commanders would escape and flee the city to another place. Seventh, the city of Nineveh would be looted of its silver and gold, And eighth, the city would be laid waste.*¹⁵

First, they were drunken (Nahum 1:10). First century A.D. Writer, Diodorus Siculus verifies the prophecy.

*The King of Assyria had become overjoyed with his past victories, so he began a celebration for his soldiers, serving them with great quantities of wine and other provisions. Learning that the army was drunken and relaxed, the Medes quickly attacked their camp by the cover of night, catching them off-guard.*¹⁶

Second, they would be bathed in blood (Nahum 3:1). The fighting was very fierce and instead of inflicting punishment, the Assyrians were finally on the losing end.

*The rebels then massed their forces on the plains before the city and defeated the Assyrians in two battles . . . some Assyrians were cut down while fleeing, while others, who had been shut out from entering the city, were forced to leap into the Euphrates river. They were destroyed almost to a man. So great was the slaughter that the water mingled with blood and could be seen for a great distance.*¹⁷

Third, they would be besieged (Nahum 3:14). The king was shut up in the city and their enemies joined the fight against them. Diodorus wrote, “The inhabitants of the city had a great abundance of all provisions, since the king had made plans for this situation. Consequently the siege dragged on.”¹⁸

Fourth, they would be destroyed by a flood (Nahum 1:8).

*Now there was a prophecy which had been handed down to him from his ancestors that ‘No enemy will ever take Nineveh by storm unless the river shall first become the city’s enemy.’*¹⁹

*But in the third year, after there had been heavy and continuous rains, it came to pass that the Euphrates running very full, inundated a portion of the city and broke down the walls for a distance of 20 stades (approximately 2 1/4 miles.)*²⁰

Fifth, the city would burn (Nahum 3:15). When the Assyrian king saw the fulfillment of the prophecy of the river, his heart melted.

*[He] abandoned all hope of saving himself. And in order that he might not fall into the hands of the enemy, he built an enormous pyre in his palace . . . he consigned . . . himself and his palace to flames.*²¹

In order that he might not fall into the hands of the enemy, he built an enormous pyre in his palace, heaped upon it all his gold and silver as well as every article of the royal

Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992),

¹⁴Barker, 184.

¹⁵<https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/41-jonah-goes-to-nineveh-and-nahum-condemns-it/nahum-predicts-the-fall-of-nineveh/>

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

*wardrobe, and then...he consigned [his concubines and eunuchs] and himself and his palace to the flame.*²²

Sixth, the generals and commanders would escape (Nahum 3:17). Once the king was dead, they fled in fear.

Seventh, the city's enormous supply of gold and wealth was looted (Nahum 2:9). Diodorus once again verifies Scripture by pointing out that "the silver and gold was carried off."²³ The Babylonian Chronicles described the spoils taken from Nineveh by the Babylonians and the Medes in these terms: "Great quantities of spoil from the city, beyond counting, they carried off."²⁴

Eighth, the city was laid waste (Nahum 3:7). The evidence for this is overwhelming.

*The city was so completely ruined by the invaders that Xenophon scarcely recognized the site. Alexander the Great marched his men past the location 'not knowing that a world empire was buried beneath his feet.' Gibbon confirmed that even the ruins of Nineveh disappeared. It was not until Layard and Botta identified the site in 1842 that the city was rediscovered by the modern world.*²⁵

*The palace had been destroyed by fire. The alabaster slabs were almost reduced to lime, and many of them fell to pieces as soon as uncovered. The places, which others had occupied, could only be traced by a thin white deposit, like a coat of plaster, left by the burnt alabaster upon the wall of sun-dried bricks.*²⁶

In Nahum 2:11-13, God discusses the lions, and history verifies the association of Assyria and the king of beasts. Lions thrived in the area and Assyrian kings went on lion hunts, which are dis-

played in their art, preserved in the London museum. "Apparently lions were captured alive and put in cages in the king's garden in Nineveh and used for staged lion hunts."²⁷

But the Assyrians were no longer the hunters. They were the prey.

Nahum mentions harlotries in 3:4, which is important since prostitution was involved in the worship of their God, Ishtar.²⁸

Nahum 3:8 begins, "Are you better than No Amon." No Amon was ancient Thebes, the Egyptian capital. It was an extraordinary city of great beauty and wealth that was captured by the Assyrians (cf. Jeremiah 46:25; Ezekiel 30:14-16).

Conclusion

Assyria attacked Judah during the time of Hezekiah and planned to lay siege against the city of Jerusalem. But God killed 185,000 of the Assyrians before the attack could begin (2 Kings 19:35-36; Isaiah 37:36-37). Years later, God put an end to them completely.

*"As the Assyrians marched, they shouted the names and titles of their vile and vicious idol Gods and took cities in the power and might of those names."*²⁹

For their blasphemy, God destroyed them. The great and powerful were wiped off the map.

"Your nobles rest in the dust.
Your people are scattered on the mountains,
And no one gathers them.
Your injury has no healing.
Your wound is severe.
All who hear news of you
Will clap their hands over you.
(Nahum 3:18-19).

²²<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/divided-kingdom/2744-nahum-nineveh-and-those-nasty-assyrians?highlight=WyJuaW5ldmVolIwibmluZXZlaCdZllo>

²³Ibid.

²⁴<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/divided-kingdom/2744-nahum-nineveh-and-those-nasty-assyrians?highlight=WyJuaW5ldmVolIwibmluZXZlaCdZllo>

²⁵Phillips, 194.

²⁶http://www.biblehistory.net/newsletter/Fall_of_Nineveh.htm

²⁷<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/divided-kingdom/2744-nahum-nineveh-and-those-nasty-assyrians?highlight=WyJuaW5ldmVolIwibmluZXZlaCdZllo>

²⁸Barker, 224.

²⁹Phillips, 187.

I AM WRITING TO YOU

Kenny Taylor

John's first letter is a treasure trove to Christians today, as much as it was to the church in the first century. It discusses a wide range of subjects that have seemingly always been problems for Christians. One phrase that occurs often in 1 John is something to the effect of, "I am writing these things to you so that..." and with this phrase follows a powerful declaration. Let's examine together each time this type of phrase is used and see God's truth as it was revealed to and written by John.

The first time we see this is right in John's introduction. He says, "And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."¹ What John is writing are things he and the others have seen and heard and experienced from the very beginning of Jesus preaching the coming Kingdom when He called them to be disciples/ apostles (Matthew 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16). These things weren't just passed down through oral tradition or something these men read about like with us. They lived these things. They are eyewitnesses so that we can know the truth of these events.

John follows this with a reassurance that if we walk in the light of God, we have fellowship with God and our fellow believers throughout all time. But more importantly, John assures us Christ's Blood continually cleanses us from our sins. He says if we deny our sins, we call God a liar. But if we confess our sins to God and strive to keep inside His light, then we know we are forgiven. This is one of the most encouraging ideas for Christians of the past and today: that we don't have to doubt our salvation; we can know we are clean.

Continuing this idea (2:1), John says he is writing to keep us from sin. This is important, because in order to walk in the light as previously discussed we need to strive for obedience and shun a sinful lifestyle. Yet, John says that when we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father! Again, it's not an idea of "well maybe if I'm good

enough, I'll get to heaven..." or "I don't know if God can forgive me..." We have a guarantee of forgiveness. Jesus came to be our sacrifice because we cannot be good enough, and He gives us assurance of our salvation. As John says:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

Now, there is an emphasis of keeping His commands here. And it's from the heart that we obey him (Romans 6:17). But what does it mean if we must obey Him, yet He knows we are still going to sin? This is a dilemma which often leads to misunderstanding Scripture. How do we reconcile these two seemingly opposed ideas? It's really quite simple. God expects obedience from us the same way we expect obedience from our children. That is why He calls us children (2:13-14). He expects us to do what He says to the best of our abilities. He expects us to obey Him as our Father. Yet He knows, like we know, that children make mistakes even when we try to obey. We misunderstand a command. We get tempted, like a child who is tempted to play instead of clean his room. We fail. But we keep trying and keep walking in that beautiful light that is Christ!

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (2:12-14)

¹ The Majority Text says "so that YOUR joy may be complete."

John refers to us as little children, fathers, and young men. These might be ways, as Mark Copeland suggests, of distinguishing between three stages of the Christian life: first we are babes in Christ, then young adults, and finally older and wiser Christians (executableoutlines.com). Personally, however, I think that John is doing more here. I think that, in a way, we are all children, even when we are old. And yet there is still a sense in which we are different from each other. So let's look at this as he appeals to us in the following three ways: children, young men, and fathers.

As children, he says that our sins are forgiven. He also says that, as children, we know the Father. This is significant because all children know the man who loves and cares for them as a father should. Some may not know their biological father, but they know the man who is there for them, loves them and makes sacrifices for them. Sometimes he is a stepdad, or a grandfather, or even a mentor. But just as sheep know their shepherd (John 10:2-5), children know who "Dad" is. And our Father in Heaven is the one who assures us that we are His children and that we're forgiven.

In addressing the young men, John commends their strength. The young often are strong. They are often more zealous and outgoing, and frequently far less jaded. Even if they often lack wisdom, there is spiritual strength in being young. John also says that the Word of God abides in the young. They keep it in their hearts and in their minds. They keep it in their zeal and in their energy. And often (with some guidance) young men do wonderful things. Timothy was one such young man, and he was told to let no one despise his youthfulness (1 Timothy 4:12). Being young and zealous for The Lord is a wonderful thing.

Of fathers he says, "you have known Him who is from the beginning." This John repeats. But why, and what does it mean? Perhaps John means, as Mark Copeland suggests, that fathers (or mature Christians) have known Christ since their first days as babes in Christ. And through maturing into young men, and then aged men in Christ, fathers have a deeper understanding of who Christ is and what The Gospel is all about. This would certainly be a strength that could be used to guide the younger, zealous Christians to maturity.

"I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you" (2:26). This is perhaps the

greatest reason that The Gospel has been written for any of us. Satan is out there (1 Peter 5:8), and he would rather have us confused.

Some aspects of John's letter address the gnostic teachings of his day, which include ideas such as doctrine that the God we know is merely a lesser manifestation (pale imitation) of true divinity, because the true God is far removed. When this idea was carried over to Christ and His crucifixion, it led to the teaching (prevalent among some) that the one who died on the cross could not have been God because God cannot die.

These false doctrines unfortunately still need to be refuted. There are people today who teach similar ideas. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, teach that Christ wasn't God, but rather Michael the Archangel (What Does the Bible Really Teach).

Other aspects of John's letter address various ploys from Satan's bag of tricks. For example, if he can make us doubt that we are really saved, then maybe he can get us to quit. John therefore gives us assurance, so that we'll have the strength and courage to endure. It's important that we know the truth in order to be free (John 8:32).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. (5:13-15)

John is giving us more assurance that we can know we have eternal life. There are many today who "hope I was good enough to get into heaven," which is sad. I'm not good enough. But by the Grace of God, I'll be in Heaven, as will you if you will but walk in the Light! Have confidence in this. John desired our confidence. I desire your confidence. And Christ reassures us because HE desires our confidence.

Furthermore, our confidence here is in more than our salvation. We are assured that when we pray to our God, HE is listening! HE cares! HE desires to grant your petitions! Never be afraid to ask God. I will say that I struggle with this. Sometimes it has felt like God didn't listen. It's felt like God didn't answer my prayer. You might feel that way. And I don't have all the answers, though I wish I did. Why did God let that baby die in spite

of all the prayers for her to live? Why did God spare me and take someone else?

I don't know, but one thing I am confident about is that God is listening and loving! God is answering our prayers in the best way according to His Divine Knowledge and Purpose. There are

some hard, faith-trying questions. And sometimes I don't know. Even in eternity I may not get answers. But I know God! And I know beyond doubt that I can put my faith and trust in HIM to do what is truly best.

T H E A C T O F

Humility

Devin Self

They came to Capernaum. And being in the house, he questioned them, "What were you disputing about among yourselves in the way?" But they were silent, for they disputed with one another in the way as to who was greater. And sitting, he called the Twelve and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

Mark 9:33-35 makes the disciples look like children. This is something you see kids do, arguing about who is the best and so forth. But the sad part is, while children do argue about such things, I've seen many adults that do the same thing. They constantly envelop themselves in pride and don't for one second think about putting others before themselves. At the end of our lives on this earth, do you think it is going to matter if you have a trophy for your worldly accomplishments? Do you think that you are go-

ing to have a reserved seat in heaven because you have 100 trophies on the wall?

You know the disciples, distracted with their continuing struggle for their personal success, were probably embarrassed to answer Jesus' question at that time. It was almost as Jesus was saying, *Why in the world are you worried about who is the greatest?* You know he had the will of God on his mind, not some petty competitive earthly position.

It is not wrong for believers to be determined or strive to succeed in life, but when it gets in the way of our obedience and service to God, it becomes sin. We are similar to the disciples (and even to the Pharisees) in this regard.

If we become prideful or insecure, it can cause us to overvalue status and reputation. In God's kingdom, though, such motives are harmful. The only safe ambition is directed toward Christ's kingdom, not our own advancement. Therefore, we need to abandon pride and status seeking. They

It is not wrong for believers to be determined or strive to succeed in life, but when it gets in the way of our obedience and service to God, it becomes sin.

are something that the devil values, not Christ.

Humility in Servitude

Luke 22:26 says:

For which one is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as he that serves.

When you put others before yourself in serving them, you show real leadership. Jesus described leadership from a whole new viewpoint. Instead of letting people do our work for us, we are to serve them and humble ourselves. Servant leaders appreciate others' worth and realize that they're not above any job. If you see something that needs to be done, don't wait to be asked; take the initiative and do it like a faithful servant. Don't approach life expecting high positions, honors, and special privileges. Look instead for ways to help others. I think pride and things of that nature have led to these societies of entitlement we have today. Just the other day I read of a grown man who shot his father because he stopped paying his rent for him. It makes you wonder what has happened to our society.

One of the things that impresses me the most about a boss, a leader, or even someone of high position in the military, is when that person does the grunt work even though they don't have to. Someone that will be on the frontlines when in a battle, rather than watching from behind in an armored tank. And that is what Jesus means when he says, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

James 4:6 says:

But he gives more grace. Therefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The answer for those evil desires that come about is humbling yourself. Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine. It creates greedy appetites for far more than we need. We can be freed from our self-centered desires by humbling ourselves before God, realizing that all we really need is his approval. When we have Christ in our mind, then we truly can see that this world's seductive temptations are only cheap alternatives for what God has to offer.

James 4:10 says:

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. To be humble involves working with his power according to his guidance, not with our own independent effort. Although we do not deserve God's favor, he reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.

Humility in Competitiveness

We also must be careful in our competitiveness. It is alright to be competitive to some degree, but it is not ok if you let it consume you. I've seen many times where someone gets so competitive they lose a sense of what they are doing, and this is dangerous. You can get wrapped up in the sin of envy, which can cause us to lose our focus on God. Proverbs 23:17 says, "Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long."

1 Timothy 6:4-7 says:

He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, from which comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

In this passage, Paul told Timothy to avoid the people who just wanted to gain financially from preaching, and from people who strayed from the sound teachings of the gospel into quarrels that caused strife in the church. We must learn to stay away from those people in the world who just want to argue

How Do I Humble Myself?

Look at Luke 14:11:

For whoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

You may be thinking, *How do I go about humbling myself?* Well there is a right and a wrong way to go about it. Some folks try to give the im-

age or impression of being humble just to manipulate others. This is, of course, the wrong way. Using people's emotions to your own benefit is deceitful and wrong. Others think that humility means putting themselves down. Truly humble people relate themselves only with Christ, realize their sinfulness, and understand their limitations. On the other hand, they also recognize their gifts and strengths and are willing to use them as Christ tells us. Humility is not self-degradation; it is a realistic assessment and commitment to serve.

Proverbs 12:15-16 says:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkens to counsel is wise. A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covers shame.

Humility is not self-degradation; it is a realistic assessment and commitment to serve.

Anytime a person gets on your nerves or maybe they hurl insults your way, it is natural and easy way to strike back at them. But you are weak if you do this. It will not solve anything, but instead will only encourage more trouble. Some people out there like conflict and wait for the opportunity to show who the tougher person is, but don't be like those fools—don't give in to their folly. Instead, answer slowly and quietly. Your positive response will achieve positive results. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath." Anger is not something we need to be caught up

in. Christians are taught to be slow to anger. Not only that, but someone who is angry, typically, is only going to see things their way. Therefore if you do give them audience, you more than likely are just wasting time trying to reason.

Last verse I want to share is Proverbs 11:2:

When pride comes, then comes shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.

After reading all these verses, I hope we can all realize the danger of being prideful. Christians need to be humbler and lowlier in heart like Jesus was, always putting others before himself. I'm telling you all of this because pride seems to be encouraged more and more every day in this world—and it is becoming worse and worse. The dog-eat-dog mentality is not the mentality we are supposed to carry as Christians. We are supposed to be doing everything we can to show love and care for each other. Not only this, but the world needs Christians to show them God's way, not the ways of the world.

Don't think because you are humbling yourself that you are weaker than those around you, because in fact it is the opposite. You are much stronger. And the more we become like Jesus, the more in God's favor we will be—which is always going to be much more beneficial to us in the end.

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Whom will you send?

"How shall they preach unless they are sent?"

Romans 10:15

ISRAEL: A HOPE IN DARKNESS

David Dean

The book of Judges ended with a clear and concise conclusion. It not only leaves the reader feeling a bit depressed, but also showcases the entirety of the book in a few short words. God simply declares, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Fortunately, the next book in the Old Testament is one that takes this depressing theme and shows us that, for some at least, what was right in their own eyes was to follow God. We have seen the descent into depravity in an earlier article, but now we can see that there is also hope in darkness!

Set during the time of the Judges, the book of Ruth is an interesting twist on what we expect to see. God’s chosen people were supposed to be examples to those around them. They were to be a Holy People, yet the book of Judges shows that they were fast becoming anything but what God would have them to be. Instead, we are introduced to a woman by the name of Ruth. This young woman is everything that God desired from his people.

Ruth experienced a rather tragic start; her father-in-law died, her brother-in-law died, and her own husband died. When we are first introduced to her, she is widowed with no children to provide for her. She lives during a time when her options are limited; the best in a worldly sense was offered to her by her mother-in-law, Naomi. Naomi, speaking to both of her daughters-in-law tells them to, “Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband” (Ruth 1:8-9). In a practical sense, taking her advice would have been the thing to do. At that moment as Naomi stood watching her two daughters-in-law, Ruth had a choice to make.

Ruth’s choice is seen in her heartwarming declaration that she will never leave Naomi. She pledges herself to the land, the people, and—most importantly—the God of Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18). These two women then head back to Israel, where

Ruth, being the younger and more able of the two, seeks a field to glean food for herself and Naomi.

When Boaz takes notice of her, we learn a few qualities of Ruth’s character. We learn she is humble—she sought permission to gather food instead of assuming it was her right to be fed. She was loyal—she sought not only her own survival but Naomi’s as well. She was diligent and hardworking—she toiled from morning until evening, only resting briefly (Ruth 2:6-7). Upon questioning his men concerning Ruth, Boaz desires to repay her for this behavior, leading to Naomi’s plan to secure both her and Ruth’s future.

There are many questions concerning the third chapter of the book of Ruth. Some scholars think that Naomi intends for Ruth to use deception and seduction to require Boaz to redeem her. Reading the text with a modern view would imply just that. “Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do” (Ruth 3:4). A quick reading could give someone the impression that Naomi is telling Ruth to have a sexual relationship with Boaz. However, that is but one interpretation of the text. What is clear is that Ruth chooses a path of righteousness. She is obedient to the words of Naomi up to the point of uncovering his feet, but from there her actions shift. Instead of waiting for Boaz to speak and instruct her in what to do she quickly identifies herself and even seeks marriage with Boaz (Ruth 3:9). That nothing inappropriate occurred between the two is evident in Boaz’s description of her as “a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

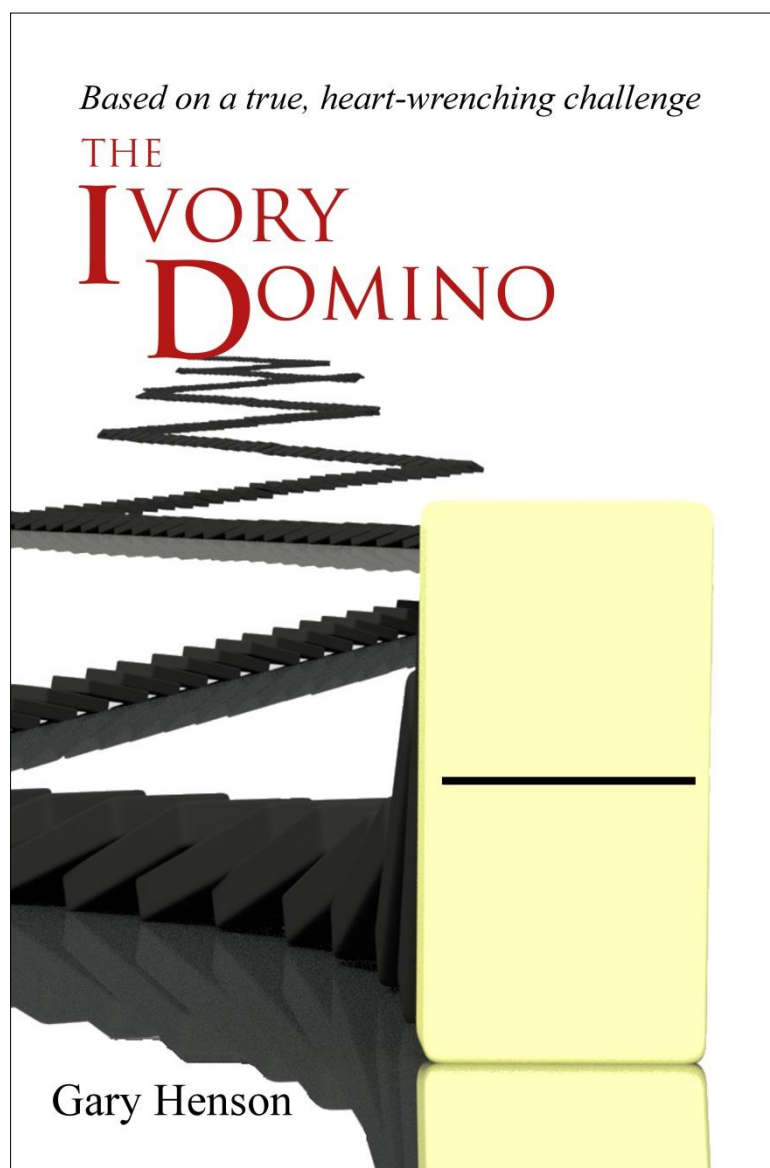
One thing to remember about Ruth is that she descends from the Moabites. The Moabite people were formed out of incest and deception. Lot’s two daughters conspired to get him drunk and then proceed to sleep with him to ensure his “legacy” (Genesis 18:30-38). That legacy would be the Moabite and Ammonite people. The Moabite people would continue this tradition by historically being seductresses. They serve this purpose in the time

of Balaam when he sought to have King Balak use them to draw away the Israelite men after false Gods (Number 25; 31:8-18). When first introduced to Ruth, the reader should be cautious. After all, the Moabites were the enemies of God's people. They had been forbidden by God to be allowed into the tribe through marriage (Deuteronomy 23:3). However, Ruth, in her dealings with Boaz, shows that someone can remove herself from the culture in which she was raised. What we expect to see of Ruth during the scene with Boaz on the threshing floor is one of seduction; instead, we are shown submission and obedience to God's will.

What we see in the story of Ruth is a woman

who encompasses all that Israel was meant to be in the eyes of God. Ruth is what Israel should have been. In that way she is a light to the reader because her story shows both God's providence and another step in His ultimate plan. Ruth was blessed in two very notable ways: first, she is the ancestor to King David, and, second, she is one of only three women listed in the genealogy of our Savior. (It could also be noted that she is also the most respectable of the three women listed). Ruth serves as a light in a time of darkness. Her light might shine brightly, but the reader would not be remiss to ask, "Does it still shine during the time of kings?"

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THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT:

Abner Jones

Bradley S. Cobb

[Note: for those who might be interested in *hearing* this information being presented, we have made available (for free) the audio of a lecture given by Bradley S. Cobb on Abner Jones. You can listen online or download it for later enjoyment from <http://www.TheCobbSix.com> (under “free downloads”). It was originally presented in 2014 at a Restoration Movement seminar in McCloud, OK.]

Introduction:

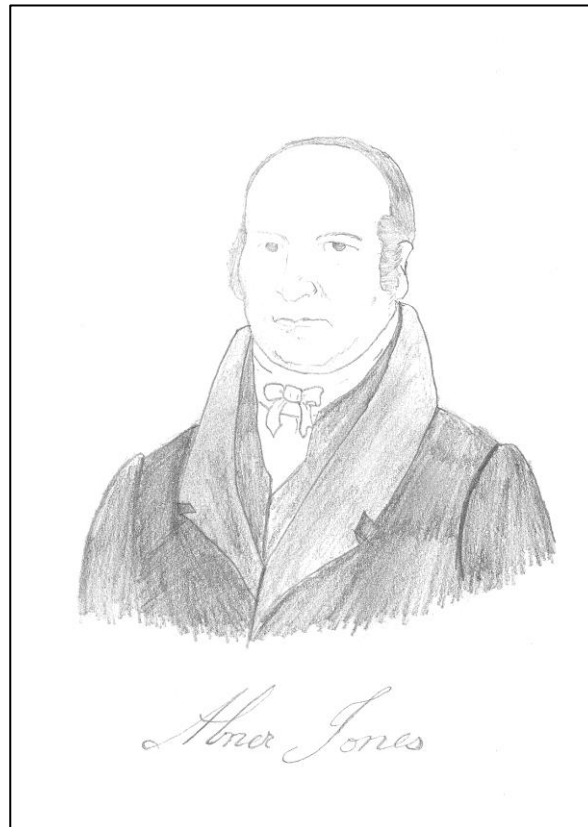
Abner Jones is not a familiar name to most people. And even for those who are somewhat familiar with the Restoration Movement, he is usually nothing more than a name to them. We think about Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, and others, but Abner Jones is usually only given a passing notice—perhaps a paragraph or two, if anything at all. Today, we will try to remedy that. Obviously, there’s no way of covering everything he ever did, but we’ll look at his life and see the things that he did to help restore New Testament Christianity.

One thing that I want to make very clear—Abner Jones was working to restore New Testament Christianity almost a decade before Alexan-

der Campbell ever set foot on American soil.

Birth and early life:

Abner Jones was born in 1772, four years before the Declaration of Independence was signed. Both of his parents were hard-core Calvinist Baptists. In fact, his father was a Baptist preacher. Needless to say, the idea of religion and eternal torment was pressed into Abner’s head from a very early age.



When he was eight years old, in the middle of winter, their family moved to Bridgewater, Vermont, which was basically a wilderness. The closest neighbor was around two miles away. They built a house completely out of logs. And in his autobiography, he makes it very clear that there were no planks, no windows, nothing except logs stacked on each other. One side of their new home was left open, and they had a continual fire going throughout the winter.

Throughout much of his early life—even up into his 20s—Abner suffered from depression. This was not a clinical depression or some chemical imbalance, but

instead it was an immense depression brought on by the thought that he might not be one of the “elect,” and that he might burn forever in hell.

Calvinist doctrine teaches that man has no control over his destiny—that God determined whether you are going to heaven or hell before you were even born, and that you have no choice in the matter. Even before he turned ten years old, Abner said that he was fully convinced that he must be born again or be damned. He desperately wanted it, but his Calvinistic Baptist upbringing warred in his mind, telling him that it didn't matter how much he wanted it—if God planned to send him to hell, that's what would happen. Because of this, his depression continued—feeling as though life was pointless unless God had chosen him to salvation. And with that depression, Abner was more and more convinced that God hadn't chosen him.

When he was ten years old, he went to a meeting (having prayed his usual prayer for God to have mercy upon him), and the message he heard made him feel alive inside. For a time, he took this to mean that God had saved him, that God had made him alive. But the feeling went away, leaving Abner more depressed than before. He did not then realize it, but his feeling of joy came when he first believed in Christ.

Because of his uncertainty about this experience, he determined to keep it to himself. However, he made the mistake of telling his mother's nosey friend that he had a secret, and she hounded him until he told her. However, after making his confession of faith, he again had a feeling of joy. But, as he did not continue on the path to salvation, his joy subsided once more.

He admits in his autobiography that he felt the need for baptism pressing upon him, but he continually rejected it—likely owing to the teaching of his parents that baptism is of no importance. As he fought against being baptized, his depression grew more and more. One day he went to his mother and told her “I am going straight to hell.” Her response was that it was still possible that he was one of the elect. This caused even more depression, because as bad as Abner wanted to go to heaven, he felt he had no power to do anything about it.

For the next six years, he did everything he could to embrace universalism (the belief that everyone will go to heaven, regardless of how they live their lives). He went to dances (which he admits he knew was wrong), and spent his time with those who didn't have any care for religion at all.

But still there was a sorrow, a deep longing for heaven—and a depression because he had resigned himself to never being able to get there. And within there was also a fear of what his friends would say if he suddenly “got religion.”

It was during these years that he had a series of events happen that he describes as God's judgments against him—judgments because he refused to be baptized. He got sick of fever so bad that he lost his apprenticeship in one place. While chopping wood, he missed and implanted the axe into his foot. During another incident when he was fighting even harder against God, he suffered a massive hernia that was never able to be completely fixed. From that point onward, he was unable to do any real physical labor.

Finding Religion

He went back home to Vermont, and there was quite the revival going on there. Abner felt ashamed of the life he'd been living, but still did nothing about it. His pride kept him from being able to publicly admit the need for salvation. Months went by, and finally he repented of his sins and determined to follow God. He began to pray a couple times at some Baptist meetings, but had not yet been baptized. He felt an intense inner feeling that he would someday have to preach.

It was upon reading his Bible and finally admitting to himself that baptism was a requirement of God for salvation that he finally submitted to the divine ordinance, in 1793. For months afterwards, Abner would occasionally preach the Calvinistic doctrines that he was raised with—but this didn't last very long, because he was studying his Bible. He realized very quickly that the Calvinistic ideas of “predestination” and “election” were foreign to the Bible, and he rejected them.

It was shortly after this that he came to the realization that the name “Baptist” was never applied to the church in the Scriptures, and he rejected that as well. From that point on (1794), he determined only to use the name “Christian.” In his studies, he also realized the entire Baptist organization was unscriptural: the way one becomes a member of the Baptist Church, their confessions of faith, and their leadership councils. So he rejected all of them.

It was around this time that he got married and went into the practice of “physic” (he became a

physic-ian). He began to build up some wealth with his medical practice, but he continued to feel the pressing urge: *I need to preach*. Eventually he completely gave up his medical practice.

The Christian Connexion

He went about preaching wherever he had the opportunity, calling people to follow only what the Bible says and nothing more. At this point, he was still aligned with the Baptist Church—though he expressly stated that he would not abide by any of their unscriptural doctrines or practices. In 1801, after ruffling many feathers in the Baptist Church, he planted a congregation of about 25 people, and they went by the name “Christians.” Later, Elias Smith joined forces with him, and they spread the wonderful news about the ability to become “Christians only.” These congregations were loosely joined together (like churches of Christ today), and as a whole, they were called “the Christian Connexion.” In 1802, a group of like-minded brethren came to him with an offer: We believe God has called you to preach, and so we are going to make sure your family is financially supported so that you can go about preaching wherever you feel God wants you to preach. Abner took this as a sign from God that preaching was what he was meant for.

Because he preached heavily against Calvinism, the Free-Will Baptists endorsed him, and even ordained him—though he refused to wear the name Baptist or to be associated with any of their confessions and practices that couldn’t be found in the Bible.

In 1804, and in the years following, Abner wrote and published quite a few hymnals—some of them with Elias Smith.

In 1805, some of the congregations gathered together and had a conference where they drew up articles of faith—old habits die hard. However, they quickly realized what they were doing, and “agreed that their articles were useless, and so they abandoned them, taking on the New Testament” as their guide.

Abner was content to let Elias Smith be the visible face in spreading the message of the Christian Connexion. Meanwhile, *he* was going around to churches, strengthening them and encouraging them. And these congregations grew, which Abner believed was God’s sign that he was doing the

right thing.

He caused quite an uproar when he began preaching against drinking alcohol in any amount—but he held his ground. He also came under fire at one point because he joined the Freemasons. Because of the outrage of a few, he resigned his membership with that group, believing that Christian Unity was far more important than belonging to any social club.

The Decline

When Elias Smith drifted into universalism and basically left the Christian Connexion for a time, it dealt a staggering blow to the congregations—and to Abner. He went about trying to keep encouraging the members, but the one who had been their unofficial leader had abandoned the cause—and the people became quite disheartened. Abner Jones did not know what to make of this, because if growing congregations were a sign of God’s being pleased with him, what did it mean when the congregations were shrinking?

Because of an outbreak of disease, he again took up his medical practice while working with the congregation in Hopkinton. After six years’ work there, he returned to Salem—only to find a congregation in ruins, having turned completely to emotion as their guide. It took seven years, but Abner rebuilt the congregation. Meanwhile, the Hopkinton congregation had merged with the Baptists.

By the 1830s, the Christian Connexion was having annual conferences (the first one was convened to discuss how to deal with the fallout from Elias Smith’s departure), and was showing the signs of drifting into denominationalism. Many of the congregations were being led by people who were Unitarians (denied the three-fold nature of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Jones’ own son identified himself as a “Unitarian minister.” Another thing that was taking place in a couple of the Connexion congregations was that women were being allowed to preach. This was not widespread, and there is nothing to suggest that Abner Jones condoned or accepted it, but it was happening.

Perhaps the final death knoll came when a man named William Miller—a charismatic man—famously predicted the coming of Christ would take place on a specific date in 1843. By 1839, he

had taken in close to half of the Connexion members with his lies. The other half was derided as being “faithless” for not believing him.

The former leaders in the Connexion were gone. Elias Smith was no longer among their number. Abner Jones was approaching 70 and was “well stricken in years.” Daniel Hix, preacher for one of the largest congregations in the movement, had died the year before. And without strong leadership in the congregations, they became ripe for the plucking.

When William Miller’s date came and went in 1843, he announced a miscalculation and said it should be 1844 instead. Undaunted, those who followed him were even more determined than ever. When the date came and went (an event, which by the way is known historically as “the Great Disappointment”), many of those who were taken in by his lies were too ashamed to go back to the brethren they had made fun of previously. The Connexion suffered an irreparable split. Those who bought into Miller’s lies were too ashamed to face the ones who knew better. The ones who knew better decided they couldn’t put their trust in those who were so easily led astray. Ultimately, the Christian Connexion split into two separate bodies. One of them joined forces with other “Christian Churches” (like those led by Alexander Campbell or Barton W. Stone) or “churches of Christ” (back then, they went by both names). The other group stayed independent and called itself “The Christian Church” (not to be

confused with the group today called the Christian Church). This group later joined with the “Congregationalists Churches,” and that group has come to be known as the United Churches of Christ.

Thankfully, Abner did not have to live to see the day when close to half of the people that he had worked so hard to teach the true gospel would fall away. He passed away in 1841.

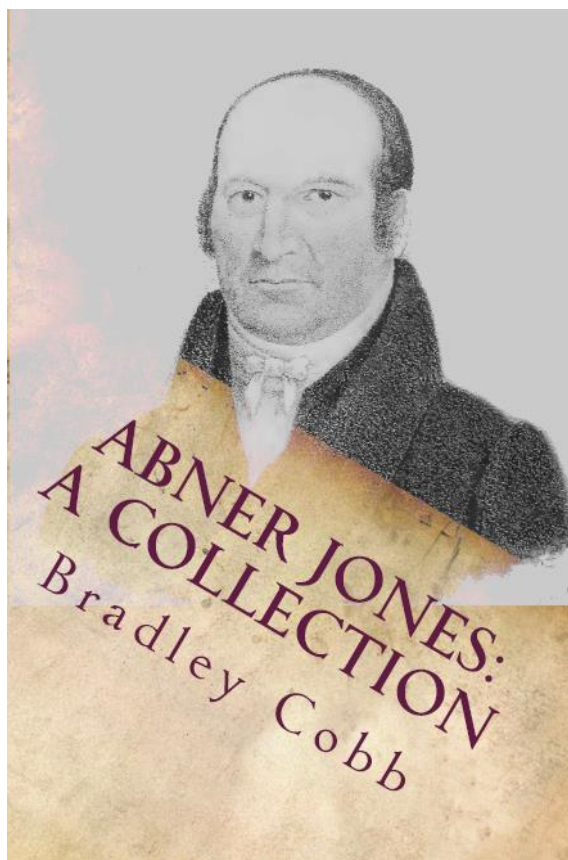
The Christian Connexion (and Abner Jones) have been claimed as part of the history of multiple religious groups including the Seventh-Day Adventists (one of William Miller’s followers started that group), the Mormons (who claimed his restoration movement was to prepare the way for Joseph Smith in New England), and even the Jehovah’s Witnesses (because a hymn book by a different man named Abner Jones used the name “Jehovah” repeatedly).

Throughout his life, Abner Jones’ main desire was to simply be a Christian and to go to heaven.

[For a more detailed look at the life of Abner Jones, check out *Abner Jones: A Collection*, which includes his 1807 autobiography, as well as two short biographies:

one written in 1907 and the other in 2009. It can be purchased from Chula Vista Books, Cobb Publishing, and Amazon.com.

A second volume is being contemplated at the present time, material for which is already being collected.]



MOSAICS AND MOTIFS OF THE BIBLE

Joshua Hames

Time would fail us to consider all the many great shadows God has placed throughout the Bible that prove it came from Him. Let's focus on a few of the lesser-known ones. This will help us get into the practice, and help us see many more when we read the word of God. These examples appear throughout the Scripture—from before Moses, to the last prophets of the Old Testament, and even into the New Testament. Their appearances are like repeating patterns that cannot be ignored, and contain important spiritual concepts. Just remember who is writing, and note that the 40-plus authors of the Bible could not have seen all these connections had they not been inspired (though the meaning of what they were writing was not always revealed to them, either), and it is powerfully evident that the same Author was behind it all, with the same message of redemption through Christ.

the so-called classics of the ancient humanities, in which, as today, the greatness of a man was measured by such earthly trivialities as his ability to win a foot race after being so many days in the deep, as with Odysseus. Not only does such nonsense show that man will not properly understand greatness, but it also displays dishonesty, even by earthly standards. And even the sons of the Gods, such as Achilles, were often petty and vindictive, mere men despite their earthly prowess. Truly man's salvation is not in himself; only Christ could prove true divinity through what the world would call weakness.

God called forth the universe from nothing,

"We are just an advanced breed of monkeys..."

—Stephen Hawking

"Everything good is the transmutation of something evil: every god has a devil for a father."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

God Produces Great Things out of Nothing (Romans 4)

God's continually calling something from nothing certainly glorified Him, showing His greatness. But the methods God employed to produce something great from nothing also contain great spiritual lessons. Note that the following examples contain evidence that they could have only come from God, because they are antithetical to the heroic stories of man. They just aren't what man would imagine, or think was great; yet they are all the greater deeds for it. Nietzsche (in his *Beyond Good and Evil*) and others of the greatest articulators of human philosophies, basically stick their foot in their mouth when they opine on the greatness of men, because they invariably demonstrate that their earthly focus and understanding is wrong and inadequate, and that only God's spiritual explanations can be Truth. I was amazed when I read

speaking it into existence. He created man from lifeless matter, the ground. Likewise, he brings forth eternal life out of a death (Romans 5). God was able (if He desired) to raise up children to Abraham from stones, from total nothingness, which He in essence did: He adopted all the nations into the lineage of Abraham, making them His own offspring (8:15). He grafted in wild olives onto His domesticated olive, yet made their produce good (11:17ff.).

God's rulers and prophets have almost never been pulled from greatness, for God does not see as men see. He saved Egypt with a lowly Hebrew, "the least of His brethren," Joseph, who had fallen even from the low state of slave into prison. God saved His people from Egyptian bondage via a man who came from the lowly Hebrews, a race of slaves; this man as a baby was as good as dead, yet God raised him up to the household of the supreme ruler, yet would make him even greater than that during a 40 year trip through the wilder-

ness. David, the father and fount of the Messianic dynasty, was a lowly shepherd, the least of His brothers (1 Samuel 16:10-11), yet without a sword in his hand, he met and felled one of the greatest warriors and subdued the nations (17:50). Among His followers, not many great nor noble were called; in fact, many of his men were Gentiles (2 Samuel 6:10; 15:18-22; 18:2), including one whose home housed the ark of the covenant!

Another sub-motif of God calling something from nothing is the lowly, abominable position of the shepherd (Genesis 46:34) to guide his people. All the family of Israel came from a line of nomadic shepherds, whose life on Earth was largely a sojourn. The following powerful Christ-shadows and prophets served as literal shepherds: Joseph, Moses, David, and Amos; even a Gentile king was described in this way, when the prophet called him by name, over a hundred years before (Isaiah 44:28).

God can defeat an army with only a hundred men, or with no men at all (Judges 7:19-21; 2 Kings 7:6). God may use fire from Heaven or some other great sign, like striking an entire force with blindness, to keep the credit and glory for himself, so that man cannot boast (2 Kings 6:18). Sometimes God would simply kill an entire force, or at least a substantial majority of it (19:35), or make a shout remove the walls that protected a people (Joshua 6). But sometimes God destroys the enemy and saves His people using the smallest of effort, with no great wonder, but a seemingly small one: e.g., God can use lepers and sounds alone to save a city that was besieged by an army of hundreds of thousands (2 Kings 7:8-10). God can strike fear into hearts by giving them a vision (Judges 7:13-14), cause them to flee, or cause them to rush upon His people who then turn and slaughter them (2 Kings 3:22-24). And God even took out great strong men with women (Judges 4:21; 9:53-57), so that all could see God's hand in it. God can cause the enemy to lose in battle so many times that they eventually find out who the exact prophet is who is against them, and even draw the enemy to the prophet to receive a mighty sign of Who is the One true God (2 Kings 6:11, 12, 18-23).

Another sub-motif of God's glory not being accomplished by human means was that which was not made with human hands. The altars under the

old law could only be made with earth, or stones that had never been hewn (Exodus 20:25); this stands in stark contrast to the ornate altars built by men for religions concocted by men. When the Temple was constructed under Solomon, no tool was heard on the actual building site (1 Kings 6:7). Likewise, Jesus built a temple with living stones (1 Peter 2:5), totally His design, and through His power alone. Truly His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). So when men, who are earthly, try to create a religion, it will always end up being earthly. Even if man could conceive of a purely Spiritual religion, he could not build it, for what mere man could die and then rise again?

Death, a powerful spiritual symbol, has long been considered inevitable and irreversible by man, for so it is. But all things are possible with God, who can even bring back to life. This was done figuratively when Moses buried and resurrected the entire nation of Israel in the Red Sea (see 1 Corinthians 10:1ff), which was then repeated by Joshua for the next generation, crossing the Jordan. It was done literally by Elijah and Elisha, powerful Christ symbols, and then again by Christ and his messengers (e.g., John 4:1-3). Today, when someone submits to the burial into Christ, they do not immerse or raise themselves, but someone else who immerses them, the individual being immersed doing nothing more than submitting to the will of God.

Salvation from Sheol, which is downward, was symbolized by God's resurrecting power. Men who were rescued from the pit of Sheol, the depths of destruction, include Joseph and Jeremiah (thrown into a cistern), Daniel (the lions' den), David (Psalm 40:2; 1 Samuel 22; 24:3), Jonah, and of course ultimately Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:38-42). The Hebrew word for a pit, dungeon, or cistern, *bowr*, is mentioned 67 times in the Old Testament, and is used figuratively for Sheol (the Hebrew word for the underworld), which occurs 66 times, and Hades in Greek (10 occurrences in the New Testament). The word for the pit into which Joseph's brothers threw him is the same word used for the prison in from which he was raised to become king (Genesis 37:20-28; 41:14). Jeremiah and the proverbs also use the Hebrew word *shuchah* for the pit in which the soul is lost (Proverbs 22:14; Jeremiah 2:6; 18:20). Time would fail us to continue with this word study, which also

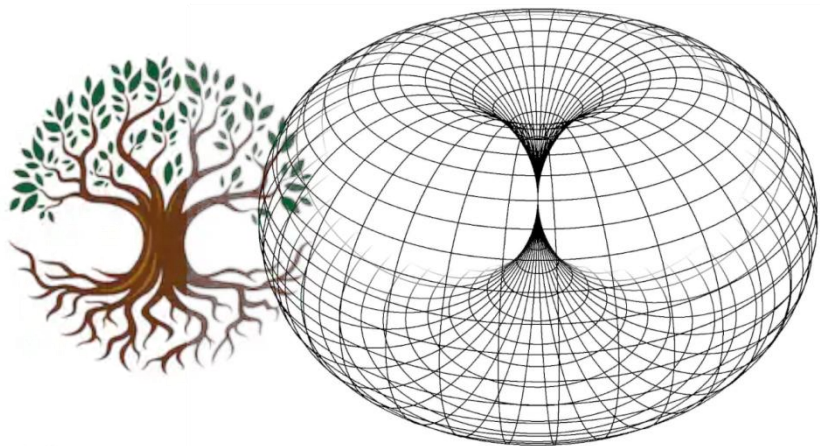
includes *tachti*, the lowest (Psalm 63:9; 86:13; 88:6; Isaiah 44:23; Lamentations 3:55; Ezekiel 26:20), *amoq*, to be deep, (Jeremiah 49:8, 30), and *abbadon*, destruction (Proverbs 15:11).

The discussion of God producing life from death would not be complete without considering the symbol of the tree through Scripture, and in nature as well. The tree obviously is a symbol of life (Genesis 3:22; Proverbs 11:30; 13:12), but why does the Scripture put emphasis on “cursed is the man who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13)? Why does death go with the life-giving frame of the tree? The answer of course points to Christ: by His death, He gave us life, and was even hung on a tree, and was thus raised (John 12:32-33).

A Device that Reverses Death

A physical, literal tree has much symbolism in its nature pointing to these spiritual truths. It draws up moisture and nutrients from the lifeless ground, by the power given it by the heavenly light, and the atmosphere, which is used as a metaphor for the Spirit (Ezekiel 37:9-14; John 20:22), provides a sort of breath (i.e., transpiration) that helps the tree cycle nutrients. Thus the tree produces life, and provides a dwelling place for and sustenance to all living creatures (Ezekiel 31). Man’s initial eternal life even came from a tree, which is almost never mentioned, because we’re too busy focusing on the other tree: but there were two trees in the center of Eden! (Genesis 2:9) In other words, the tree reverses death: it is the crux (etymological pun intended) where God resurrects. At the point where the tree comes out of the ground, the tissues of the tree reverse, so the exterior layer of the roots becomes the core of the trunk, and the core of the roots become the outside layer of the trunk: the point at which this occurs is called the “crown”; in fact, if you plant a tree without the crown being at ground level, it can kill the tree. A circle is also used as symbol of the cycle of earthly life (Ecclesiastes 12:7), and so it is: the tree draws nutrients and moisture up and inward from the ground and then moves them up and outward, and produces food in the leaves and fruits, and, at least

for deciduous trees in non-tropical climates, dies back in the downward cycle of the fall, and drops its lifeless leaves back to the ground, which “return to the ground from which they came” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Non-deciduous trees produce this cycle continually, as their leaves/needles drop regularly to the lifeless earth to feed the soil and once again the tree, and to preserve life-giving moisture. Maybe you’ve never noticed, but the tree is not just a symbol of a circular cycle, but is actually a torus, a three dimensional circle, a circle rotated around an axis...forming a circled circle! Perhaps even a wheel in the middle of a wheel? (Ezekiel 1:16). Man has often bred trees to produce certain desirable traits, such as flavorful fruit, but such breeding causes weaknesses, which are typically surmounted by grafting the less natural tree into a hardier natural tree’s root stock that can preserve its life. Likewise it is only the branch of the vine through Whose power we can produce, not of our own power (John 15:4); for without Him, we would die. Another part of the tree illus-



tration is that some types of trees can be cut down and yet grow back. (Job 14:7; Isaiah 11:1). This idea will come into play when we discuss the remnant, but for now let’s note that Christ is referred to as a branch or shoot which branches forth, in both Isaiah and in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12.

There are several more life-coming-from-death symbols in the Bible that clearly point to Christ. A grain of wheat does not produce unless it first be buried and die (John 12:24). It is only through great pain that life is brought forth into the world, and this was fixed upon the first sin/spiritual death (Genesis 3:16), which is used on several occasions by the prophets to illustrate Israel’s need for spir-

itual rebirth (Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; etc.).

The Great Provider and Physician

Blindness, also an irreversible malady from man's perspective, even with modern medicine, is also curable by God. It too is a spiritual symbol of our inability to see the spiritual because of our own desire to persist in carnal thought (Matthew 13:15).

Apart from curing the blind, Jesus' entire ministry was filled with examples of God calling something from nothing. Just as Moses provided the manna in the wilderness, Jesus provided loaves and fishes for 5,000 on one occasion, and 4,000 on another (Matthew 16:9-10), which was all ultimately a symbol of the spiritual bread that God offers the world from His Son, that spiritual food found in His word that gives eternal life (John 6:35, 68). Also, just as Moses called forth water from a rock, Christ offered a fountain overflowing, and water that if we drink we will never thirst again (John 4:14). Just as Elijah and Elisha, Jesus offered total healing, except He did it to those that came to Him, thousands of souls that came out of entire regions and Roman provinces; all of this a symbol of what the great physician can do for our souls—total healing. Note that the miracles of healing and raising the dead were rare before Christ, who was to do signs in both magnitude and quantity the likes of which the world had never seen; Elisha, as an outlier, was a Christ symbol, while Elijah was the one who prepared the way for him, a symbol of the prophet John the Immerser, Elijah even parting the Jordan for Elisha (2 Kings 2:8). Jesus offered these things of great value, far more valuable than gold, just as Elijah provided for the widow with the valuable commodity of oil; and too Jesus offers us an anointing that is life itself with the Father (2 Corinthians 1:21).

The barren woman whose womb was opened by God was another sub-motif of God calling great things from nothing, such as Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5). Indeed, the most powerful examples of the barren woman's descendants becoming as the sand of the sea in number was from the women found in the lineage of Christ, for it was these women who gave us the Savior who blesses all nations. It is a powerful God who saves the world

through a man who should never have been born. To fully illustrate how powerful this device is, consider that all three women of the three generations that gave us the children of Israel were barren: Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. Surely this is no accidental or incidental detail, but part of God's great spiritual message found in seemingly mundane details. Then when the Christ came, it was a virgin who gave birth to Him. Truly God excluded man from His plan to save, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Consider Sarah for a moment. What 90-year-old woman can bear children (Genesis 17:17)? But God produced the child of promise, through whom the entire world would be blessed, from a barren nonagenarian. But going by the actions of Abimelech in Genesis 20, when he tries to take her for his wife, it would appear that God worked a mighty change in her. What king seeks to marry a woman for her beauty unless she appears young? God making someone young certainly is not beyond His capability, and is not implausible considering that His keeping people young is not unprecedented in the Bible. Caleb was kept spry for the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness because he was faithful (Joshua 14:11); Moses was described at 120 years old as still having his full strength; and it may be that God kept Joshua just as He did Caleb, for Joshua was the other faithful spy and was a great general for a long time after entering Canaan, and lived to be 110, exactly 40 years past 70, which is a normal human life-span of that time and since. And the patriarchs, whom God saw fit to let live extremely long lives, are another example of at least some youth being maintained, based on the following reasoning: we are not told how long it was that Adam was alone before He created Eve, but it seems likely that it was not decades, and the Bible tells us that Adam was 130 years old when he had Seth (Genesis 5:3), and Eve would almost certainly have been the same age as Adam.

Making the Unholy Holy, Cleansing the Uncleanable

Something dirty that touches something clean can only tend to make the clean object dirtier. The clean object will not make the dirty object clean. Yet God can do anything.

Let's now focus on a mosaic/shadow/type of

immersion (baptism) found in the Old Testament, that of the Flood (1 Peter 3:21). The Flood is such an important symbol that it is referenced at least nine times in the New Testament, and over two dozen times outside of Genesis in the Old Testament. In fact, Peter uses it as a lesson on more than one occasion to prove that there will be a final judgment, for if God did it once as He promised, He will do it again, as He also promised (1 Peter 3:20-21; 2 Peter 3:5-7). Now, stay with me for a very brief, but important detour: Under the Old Law, there was a seemingly insignificant rule about what to do with a garment that had a mold-type growth in it (Leviticus 13:47-52): cleansing was first tried by water. If that was ineffective, then it was mandatory that the garment be burned. The Flood was a cleansing that allowed the good to again flourish on the Earth, just as God shortened the persecutions of the first century to preserve the elect (Mark 13:20), and waits till harvest time to totally destroy the sinners, lest the wheat be damaged in pulling up the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). It is that end that will be by fire (2 Peter 3:10), just as the law of the uncleanness in a garment that cannot be washed with water.

Likewise the Bible teaches that no sin can be cleansed except with blood. Life is in the blood, and a life can only be given for a life (Hebrews 9:22). Blood is something that stains deeply, just as grape juice or wine does, making it an excellent symbol of blood. You would not usually think of

using a liquid that stains as a cleansing agent. Yet the way God cleanses our sins is by covering them (Romans 4:7); we “put on” Christ when we are saved (Galatians 3:27). It is Christ’s blood that covers our sin. Yet God is also the greatest launderer, for He truly can whiten with blood (Revelation 3:405). Unrighteously shed blood pollutes a land, and can only be covered from the eyes of God by the shedding of the blood of the guilty; this is a law that goes back to the time of Noah, and continues till today (Genesis 9:4-6; cf. Romans 13:4).

Earthly filth gets on things, and tends to stay on them. If you touch it with a clean thing, it will only serve to make the clean thing dirtier: the dirty thing typically will not thus become clean. But God made certain symbols of what Christ would do for us, clean objects that can touch something unclean and make it holy (Exodus 29:37; 30:29; Leviticus 6:18, 27; cf. Job 14:4; Haggai 2:12; Matthew 8:3; 9:20)! Truly water (often with another surfactant) is a “solution”! For God cleanses us with the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). But all who reject God’s washing (John 13:8) will be reserved for the cleansing of fire, which cannot preserve the unclean object, but only destroy it (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

For more examples of mosaics and motifs found throughout God’s word, check out more articles at diggingintheword.com!

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WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY – PART 2F

Allocate Our Gifts – A Study of Ephesians 4:7-16

Jake Schotter

Our Progress So Far

As we progress in our study of Ephesians 4, we have examined the first eleven verses. We arrive, now, at the final section of the second (of three) headings in this chapter. The first article covered verses 1-6; articles 2a through 2e have covered verses 7-11, and we are beginning to study verses 12-16 in this current article. Lest this is confusing, an overview outline is given below.

- I. WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY (4:1-6)
 - A. The call to walk in a manner worthy (4:1)
 - B. The characteristics of walking worthy (4:2-3)
 - C. The church has a worthy walk (4:4-6)
- II. ALLOCATE YOUR GIFTS (4:7-16)
 - A. The grace that has been given by Christ (4:7-10)
 - B. The gifts that have been given to the church (4:11)
 - C. The growth that occurs among Christians (4:12-16) (*We're here!*)

The Problem of Pragmatism

Jesus declared, “*the gates of Hades will not overpower*” the church (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, the church will have a presence throughout all time. The question for us to consider, then, is “how much influence will the church have?” When we consider answering this question, we must not quickly turn to church growth experts, seminars and conferences, books, or special ways to engage people. To be effective outside the church, we must begin by working on the inside of the church.

Far too many in our day have been focused on being attractive to the world by becoming like the world. John MacArthur wrote a very helpful book on this issue, *Ashamed of the Gospel*. In this book, he confronts the practice of pragmatism where the worth of something is determined by its consequences. In other words, if it gives us what we want, then it must be good. In some cases that is a

good sign. Combining pragmatism and theology, however, is an unholy mix. Consider these thoughtful statements from his book.

Is pragmatism a reliable test?

Scriptural and biblical truth is not determined by testing what ‘works’ and what doesn’t. We know from Scripture, for example, that the gospel often does not produce a positive response (1 Cor. 1:22, 23; 2:14). On the other hand, satanic lies and deception can be quite effective (Matt. 24:23, 24; 2 Cor. 4:3, 4). Majority reaction is no test of validity (Matt. 7:13, 14), and prosperity is no measure of truthfulness (cf. Job 12:6).¹

What is the cost of pragmatism?

Theology now takes a back seat to methodology. One author has written, ‘Formerly, a doctrinal statement represented the reason for a denomination’s existence. Today, methodology is the glue that holds churches together. A statement of ministry defines them and their denominational influence.’²

Several more questions could be asked and answered by the book. More importantly, the Bible gives us a very clear answer.

Let’s ask the Bible a question: Is the church to be like the world?

...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4)

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15)

¹ MacArthur, John. **Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World** Expanded Edition. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993: xiii.

² Ibid. MacArthur is quoting from Towns, Elmer L. **An Inside Look at 10 of Today’s Most Innovative Churches**. Ventura: Regal, 1990: 249.

Israel was no exception – they were supposed to be different than the world around them (Isaiah 30:1-2; 31:1; 42:6; 49:6; Zechariah 4:6).

Because the church is the people of God (Ephesians 4:4; 5:29-30; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Romans 12:4-5), the expectation to believe and behave differently than the world should be obvious. The church should reflect the diversity of backgrounds in the community, but the culture of sinful man should be carefully avoided, lest it infects the health of the church.

Tim Challies wrote a blog on “The Church’s Immune System.” In that piece, he wrote:

Have you ever considered that spiritual discernment functions much as the church’s and the Christian’s immune system? The parallels are crystal clear. It is spiritual discernment that allows us to identify and overcome the disease of false doctrine and false gospels. Like the body’s immune system, discernment responds to ‘disease,’ quickly identifying and destroying what is foreign. What this means is that without discernment we are like a body without an immune system. We are [like a] church stricken with AIDS. We are helpless and hopeless; we will be destroyed. It is not the lack of spiritual discernment that will kill us, but the lack of protection that spiritual discernment offers – the kind of protection that allows us to filter truth from error and right from wrong.³

In other words, many churches are suffering from spiritual AIDS and can die of thousands of heresies because they have no immune system—no spiritual discernment because they are letting whatever sounds good into their congregations.

Discernment is vital for a healthy spiritual life and a healthy church. This is especially vital for those who proclaim the message and are the leaders over their sheep (Acts 20:29-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; Hebrews 13:17). These men must be concerned about truth, knowledge, discernment, wisdom, and understanding...

³ Challies, Tim. “The Church’s Immune System.” Tim Challies, 5 Nov. 2016, www.challies.com/christian-living/the-churchs-immune-system/.

Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom (Psalm 51:6)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments (Psalm 111:10)

Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments (Psalm 119:66)

Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:2-6)

The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding (Proverbs 4:7)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9)

In whom [Christ] are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Discernment comes from the solid foundation of God’s revealed truth. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), so,

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing” (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

The teacher’s proclamation must be faithfully interconnected with the Word (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:2-3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). It is tragic when a very small amount of people actually know the

Word.

There was a time when one well-known prosperity, feel-good ‘preacher’ appeared on CNN and in a matter of a three-minute span uttered at-least nine times “I don’t know” about questions regarding who and how one can be saved.⁴ Why would you allow that person to be one of your spiritual teachers and leaders? This is absolutely dangerous! We need preachers who know the truth, proclaim the truth, and defend the truth and nothing but the truth!

MacArthur writes,

In practical terms, the movement to accommodate the world has diminished Christians’ confidence in divinely inspired truth. If we can’t trust the preaching of God’s Word to convert the lost and build the church, how can we trust the Bible at all – even as a guide for our daily living? People are learning from the example of some of their church leaders that faithfulness to the Word of God is optional. Furthermore, as biblical preaching continues to diminish, ignorance of Scripture grows. An increase in biblical illiteracy leads inevitably to the rise of reckless faith. We cannot avoid being an offense to the world and still remain faithful to the gospel. The gospel is inherently offensive. Christ Himself is offensive to unbelievers. He is an offense to all in error. He is an offense to all who reject the truth”⁵

Michael Horton wrote an analysis of the American church in his book *Christless Christianity*. At the beginning of chapter 1, he recounted a sermon by the late Donald Grey Barnhouse.

What would things look like if Satan really took control of a city?... Barnhouse speculated that if Satan took over Philadelphia, all of the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each oth-

er. There would be no swearing. The children would say, ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘No, ma’am’...

According to Barnhouse, Satan ran Philadelphia in such a way that it was fully functioning city that was seemingly upright and moralistic... an ideal place to be! But Barnhouse didn’t stop there; he added one phrase that changes everything:

...and the churches would be full every Sunday... where Christ is not preached.⁶

Horton further commented,

Wherever Christ is truly and clearly being proclaimed, Satan is most actively present in opposition... Yet even in this pursuit, he is more subtle than we imagine. He lulls us to sleep as we trim our message to the banality of popular culture and invoke Christ’s name for anything and everything but salvation from the coming judgment... the church in America today is so obsessed with being practical, relevant, helpful, successful, and perhaps even well-liked that it nearly mirrors the world itself.⁷

There is great wisdom to be exercised when James wrote, “*Let not many of you become teachers*” (James 3:1) because of the potential for change agents. We do not need any more change agents! – we need more constant agents! We need preachers who are ready “*in season and out of season*” who do endure sound doctrine, who do not tickle people’s ears and give them what they want but need to hear and keep their ears close to the truth. We need sober preachers who endure hardship and fulfill their ministry. These are Biblical mandates, not options (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

A church cannot be strong if its pulpit is weak. Therefore, we must have those who proclaim the Word to do their jobs well. If a church is going to be allocating its gifts and using them as God intended for the growth of the church, we must obey the Scriptures.

Biblical preaching cannot be geared toward meeting felt needs, solving psychological

⁴ transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0506/20/lkl.01.html

⁵ MacArthur, John. **Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern**. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994: 54-55.

⁶ Horton, Michael. **Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church**. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008: 15.

⁷ Ibid., 16

problems, amusing the audience, making people feel good about themselves, or any of the other hollow fads that have commandeered pulpits in this entertainment-oriented age. Biblical preaching must uphold the truth of God and demand that it be heeded. There is plenty of room for innovation and creativity within those guidelines, but the message itself cannot be altered or abridged in any way without prostituting the church's responsibility. Truth proclaimed powerfully from the Scriptures is the *sine qua non* of the church. Any other kind of preaching is not worthy of the church Christ is building.⁸

The Passage under Examination

In the first six verses of chapter four, Paul addresses the whole church. He tells the Ephesians that unity is of utmost importance. As Paul quickly notes, unity must first be the spirit we all share. When this is done, *"the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace"* (4:3) will be able to be realized. Unity is made possible when everyone shares the same spirit that fosters peace: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and diligence. This provides the optimal working environment in everyone's quest for doctrinal unity. Furthermore, the growth of the church is amplified using the grace given to each one of us by Christ (4:7). Recognizing the Lord has called the church *"Christ's body, and [we are] individually members of it"* (1 Corinthians 12:14, 27) should spur us to action.

There is a recognition that within the congregation, according to 4:7-16, there are groups of believers who share common gifts. Paul emphasizes, in 4:11, there are some gifted as faithful teachers – people who impart biblical teaching to people. Even in this group, there are differences because of their position and audience. Notice their general *"direction."* Some are outward focused by proclaiming the fundamentals of the faith to prospective believers while others are more inward based and helping the church become deeper and stronger in their understanding of Biblical teaching. All of these are necessary!

This, then begs the question, *"Why?"* Paul gives us several answers in verses 12 through 16 when he writes,

...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

We will be examining these verses in further detail in the next issue.

Lessons from the Old Testament



DOROTHY TATUM

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⁸ MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, pp. 187-188.

Quotes

In reality, being led by the Spirit has more to do with our choice to follow His revealed will, than with the Spirit coming into our lives and making our choices for us.

Lance Mosher

Clouded by Emotion: Studies on the Holy Spirit and Miracles (2019, LanceMosherBooks.com)

One day a guy called me from Oklahoma. I can't remember what town. "Are you Carroll Sites?" "Yes" (with a southern drawl). "Well I just want to tell you my wife goes to bed with you every night." I said, "Oh, what kind of kook is this? You're going to have to hold up." He said, "No, we get your cassette tapes. And she takes one of those and listens to it every night when she goes to bed. And I just want to tell you, today she was baptized... I've been trying for years to get the woman to be baptized."

Carroll Sites

(From his final interview in 2017)¹

It is the world, the flesh, and the devil. A triple play of misery!

Kyle Frank

To Satan and Back (coming soon)

Had his will been irresistibly restrained, abstaining from evil would have been no virtue in him: but, as he was possessed of sufficient power to stand, and yet free, thus voluntary obedience was virtue, to be rewarded; and voluntary rebellion must be punished with death.

James O'Kelly

Original Truth (1807)

A real church of Christ has always been in this world since Pentecost, and this means: a church believing in faith, repentance, confession, and

immersion for the remission of sins—a church which worshipped at least the first day of the week, with hymns, prayers, the Lord's Supper, Bible study and contributions for the saints—a church which worked under the oversight of bishops, deacons, and evangelists—a church—not some isolated seekers, but an organized church, which trusted in the Lord's promise that "the powers of death will never prevail against it."

Hans Grimm

Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe

Do what you can do today, so that tomorrow you can do the things you couldn't do today.

Craig Groeschel

(From a Sermon)

WOULD YOU WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD—EVEN IF IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU CURRENTLY BELIEVE? Do you really want to know truth: 'I just want to know the truth about God—even if it goes against everything I was raised with; even if I grew up in a Christian church and the truth were different from what I believe. I just want to know the truth about God.' Or do you want to just keep believing whatever you believe, because you like it right now? I mean: what if it's not true? What if it's not true—what is said at every funeral that ever happens: 'Oh—she's in a better place!' What if that's not true? Do you want to know that? Or do you want to just stay in your own little world and be happy? I mean, how badly do you want truth? Because there are people who say: 'I refuse to believe that God would ever send anyone to a place called Hell. I refuse to believe in a....' You refuse?? Well, what if it's true?"

Francis Chan

(From the sermon, *The Resurrection: So What?*)

¹ The editor of this publication interviewed Carroll Sites just two weeks before he passed away. Sadly, the recording cut off just ten minutes into the hour-long interview, with no one noticing until it was too late.

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LET THERE BE LIGHT

Bill Howard

The first words of recorded history tell us of God making the decision to create the heaven and the earth. Prior to His deciding to do this, we are told the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep (Genesis 1:1-2). There was no earth; everything was in darkness, and God had much to accomplish in the next six days. His first act was to call for light. ‘And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.’ (Genesis 1:3). It is impossible for us to know the mind of God, so there is no point in conjecturing as to why this was the first thing He required. What we do know is that God has a plan for everything, and this is what He intended. He divided the light from the darkness and called the light Day, and two days later God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night (Genesis 1:16). God wanted light, and there was light. He created the sun and the moon to supply a continuous light for His creation. The entirety of creation went exactly as God had designed.

When God was finished with his creation of the heaven and earth, he created human beings in His image. He created a home in a beautiful garden for the first humans that he made, and everything was perfection. Unfortunately, perfection was shattered when an ugly darkness crept in and cast a repulsive shadow that dimmed the light of God’s creation.

Sin.

The first recorded sin on earth was committed by the now imperfect man and woman who lost their innocence as well as their home and the personal relationship with their God. Because they disbelieved what God had told them, they sinned, and now sin was a part of the world as Paul would later point out to the Romans. ‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned’ (Romans 5:12). Not only was sin brought into the world, but also death, and because of sin, man was estranged from God.

While God was creating all that came into being, He said ‘Let there be light,’ and light happened. Now, because of man’s actions, God saw the need for a different light: A brighter, permanent light that would not fade and could not be dimmed. The two great lights He had made previously, the sun and moon, are not permanent lights. They will one day be destroyed along with the earth and all of God’s creation (2 Peter 3:10). A new light was needed which would have to be much more efficacious: in fact, there would be no limitation to the power of this light. That light said of himself: ‘all power is given unto me in heaven and earth’ (Matthew 28:18). There is no greater power than ‘all power.’ That light will have far greater responsibilities and be never-ending as long as earth stands. God would have just such a light prepared to shine on all of mankind to make a way possible for man to be forgiven of sin and

reconciled to him. Jesus is that light. John referred to this light as the ‘light of men’ and, ‘the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:4 and 9). Jesus said: ‘as long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world’ (John 9:5). Jesus is this light who makes the way for man to be reunited with God. Jesus’ words: ‘I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me’ (John 14:6). ‘I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life’ (John 8:12).

Because of the dire need for this light, God sent his Son Jesus to be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). The writer of the Hebrew letter said this of Jesus: ‘he hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Hebrews 9:26b). The sin that cast the spell of darkness on man could now be overcome with this new light, Jesus Christ. No longer would the world have to walk in darkness. Again the words of Christ: ‘I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness’ (John 12:46).

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved’ (John 3:16-17). Jesus sent his Apostles to tell the world of this light: this Savior Jesus. ‘And He said unto them, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned’ (Mark 16:15-16). It is God’s wish that all mankind will be saved. He is not willing that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He sent this magnificent light to lead man out of darkness. ‘For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:6). We would not stumble around in our home in darkness; we would employ the light that we might walk safely. Why would we stumble around in the darkness of sin when we could be in the light of God’s Son and be safe? All God asks of us is to believe in His Son Jesus, be

willing to turn away from sin, tell of our faith by confessing that we do believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for our sins, and be baptized for the remission of the sin. When we do this we are born again into the family of God, to be known as Christians, and we are a part of His kingdom here on earth, his church. Then as the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome: ‘I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service’ (Romans 12:1). To the church at Ephesus: ‘For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light’ (Ephesians 5:8).

Jesus is the light and as children of God we are in Christ and walk in that light. John wrote: ‘If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin’ (1 John 1:7). This ongoing cleansing of sin by the blood of Christ is conditional upon our continuing to walk in the light and in fellowship with God and his family. ‘For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God: strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience all longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light’ (Colossians 1:9-12). Again, Paul to the Ephesians: ‘I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love’ (Ephesians 4:1-2). ‘That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory’ (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

The living sacrifice of which Paul speaks is an admonishment to give ourselves as children of God to walking in such a manner as is becoming to Christians, conforming our lives to the wishes of our Father as instructed in his word and above all to never lose sight of the goal which we wish to attain.

How Does God Speak To Us Today?

Jim Stutts

Has God ever communicated with humankind? According to God's Word, the Bible, he certainly has! The first spoken words of God to man are found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. When man and woman were created, God began personally speaking to them (Genesis 1:28ff). Thus began a continual, verbal, personal communication with God speaking to or with humankind for centuries—throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament period. It should be noted that in the Old Testament, He first spoke through the Patriarchs (family fathers—Patriarchal Age), then through Moses (Mosaic Age). This later period involved the Law of Moses, through which God spoke to the Israelites (Exodus 20). The Law of Moses was not written to or for Christians, however, but was written for our learning while we are under Christ's law, the New Testament (Romans 15:4). In addition to the written Law, God continued to speak directly to man through inspired Old Testament prophets. Whether written or verbal communication, God spoke!

But which method does God use today? "God who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2). Please observe: (1). God, in the "past" (Old Testament), spoke to mankind in different ways from the way he spoke to those in the first century (Christian/New Testament age). (2). In the "last days," which began in the first century (and continue today), God speaks through His Son. God does not speak to us through Moses, or the Old Testament prophets, nor does He speak verbally to anyone today, but He speaks today through His Son! On the mount of transfiguration,

God made it plain to those gathered there, that they were only to hear His Son! (Matthew 17:1-6).

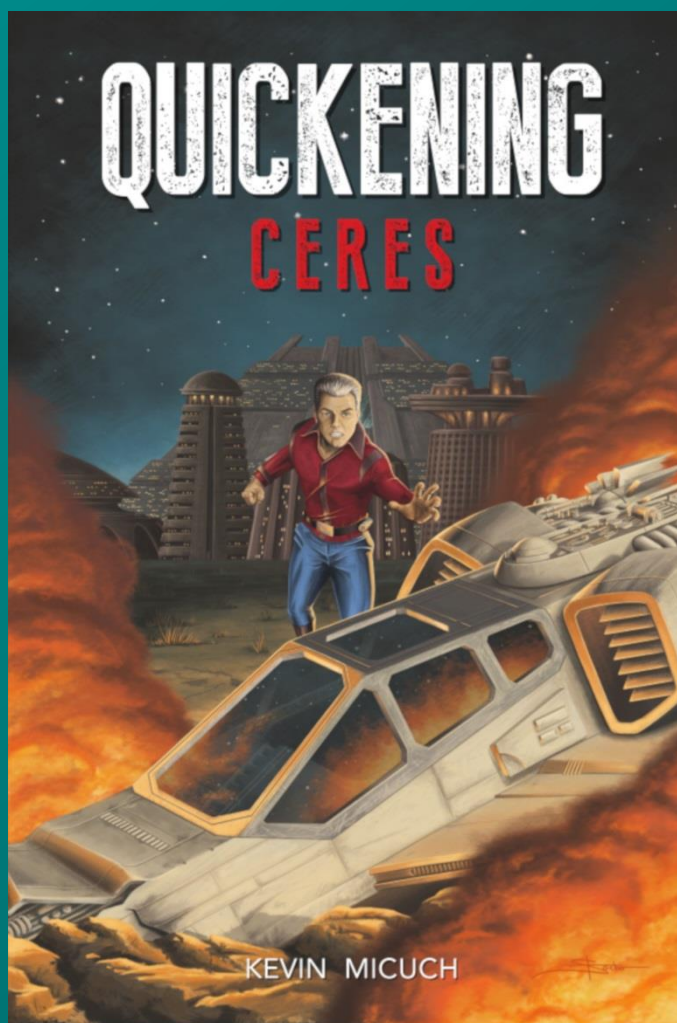
So how does God speak to us today? The Bible gives the answer! (1). Jesus said that after his death and resurrection, a Comforter would come to carry on communication with mankind (John 14:26; 16:13). (2). The Apostles and other New Testament writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak for Christ, who transferred authority to them (Matthew 16:18-19). (3). On Pentecost (a Jewish feast day), in Acts 2, the miraculous baptism of the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, causing them to speak in languages ("tongues") they didn't know, so God could speak to this vast audience from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:1-8). The sermon, spoken through this miracle of languages (tongues), caused the conversion of 3,000 who heard the Gospel and obeyed the Word by being immersed in water to have their sins washed away, thus adding them to the church. (Acts 2:38-47).

Now what do we know first handedly today, about creation, the history of mankind, God's love and wrath, the marvelous stories of obedient servants of God, the story of Christ, the church of Christ, and a host of other things about God? The answer is only what we can know through the Bible! So, does God speak through the Bible? Yes, and a thousand times yes! Does he speak today outside his written Word, the Bible? A thousand times no! Multiplied thousands of preachers claim God speaks to them as they speak, resulting in thousands of different and opposing doctrines flowing from their mouths!? If what they say is more than what the Bible says, it is too much! If what they say is less than what the Bible says, it is

too little! Revelation 22:18-19 condemns those who add or take from the Word of God! Inspired Paul warned those who followed men and doctrines contrary to Christ's Gospel. Even if an angel came and spoke (Galatians 1:8-9), God would curse those who would listen to men or angels!

Over 30,000 denominations have been created by men or women who falsely claim that, "God laid it on my heart," or "the Holy Ghost told me what to say." Christ condemned religious division when He prayed for oneness and unity of His followers! (John 17:20-21). Something never coming from a denominational preacher's mouth is what Paul wrote: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined

together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). Now beloved reader, what is Christ saying to us via His inspired apostle Paul in this written Word? Could God's Word be any clearer? "God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (I Cor. 14:33). The unifier of Christianity is the Gospel contained in scripture: "All scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work." Dear reader, this verse makes it plain that God today speaks through Christ, who in turn speaks through His inspired writers who wrote the Holy Spirit's message in the Bible! Yes, God indeed speaks to us today in His inspired, infallible, absolute, complete Word—the Holy Bible!



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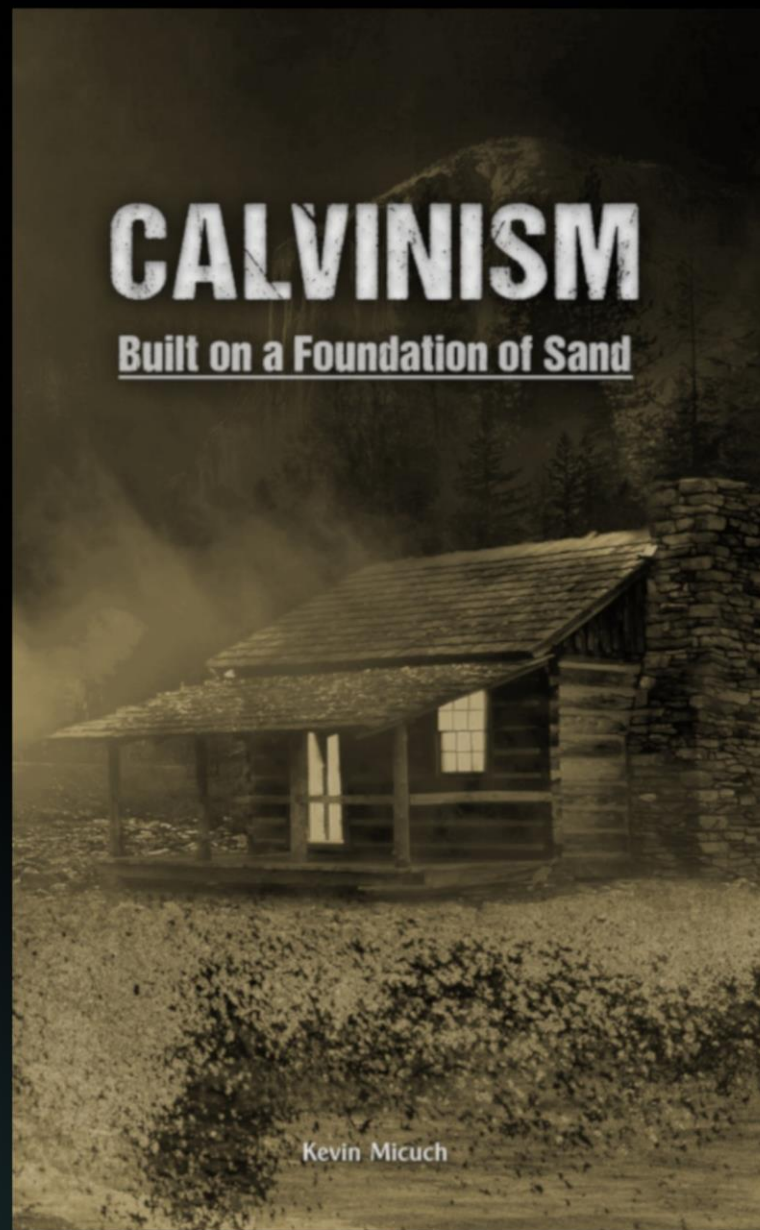
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*-Douglas John Gill II, Calvinist
(ReformedPresby.com)*



Calvinism: Built on a Foundation of Sand

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TABERNACLE SHADOWS

The Tabernacle Tent

Mark McWhorter

The Tabernacle Tent had various items included in its make-up. Since God never gives instructions for no reason, it is up to us to study and attempt to learn what he intended to convey. Some things are easy, but some things are difficult to understand. And it is possible that there may be several messages with each part.

The Coverings and Curtains are discussed in Exodus 26: 1-14. The first set of coverings was formed of ten curtains, each 28 cubits long and 4 cubits wide. There would be 1 cubit on each side of the boards which would not be covered.

Inner Curtains

The Inner curtains were in 2 sets with five in a set. They were held together by 50 taches of gold, which fastened into 50 loops of blue, forming one tabernacle. These had mingled colors of blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen. They represent the One who died on the cross and is now in heaven.

The inner curtains were only seen overhead since they hung on the outside of the boards. The priest had to look up to see the colors of Christ. The light of the lampstand brought out the colors and beauty overhead, as well as the gold taches.

Blue told of his divinity. Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God." There is more to this than simply stating that the stars, moon, and environment make a person think of God. The constellations give a message, (Genesis 1:14) – signs.

Jesus said he came down from heaven, (John 6:33 and John 3:13). Paul calls him heavenly, (1

Corinthians 15:47-49).

Purple conveys his royalty. Isaiah 9:7, calls him the Prince of Peace. In Psalm 2:6, David calls him the King. The Wise Men in Matthew 2:2 wanted to know where the King of the Jews had been born. Jesus acknowledged it in Matthew 27:11, "And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest." John records it thusly, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

Scarlet speaks of his humility, manhood, and sacrifice. When God named the first man he called him, Adam. Adam means 'red earth.' He was a creature of the earth with red blood. The writer of Hebrews says that just as man is a partaker of flesh and blood, "he also himself likewise took part of the same" so that through death he could destroy the power of death, (Hebrews 2:14). Paul calls him the "last Adam," (1 Corinthians 15:45). Jesus became flesh and blood just like the first Adam. And he came to shed that blood.

God spoke to Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16, stating that he had chosen them, loved them, and made a covenant with them. He clothed them with broi-dered work, with silk, and fine linen. He clothed them with gold and silver earrings, chains, and bracelets. These were symbols of righteousness and heavenly reward. These are seen in the **fine linen** embroidered curtains with the gold rings and

blue loops. Christ was elevated and rewarded for his sinless life and sacrifice. Psalm 45 also gives a picture of the beauty given to the righteous.

Cherubim were embroidered into them. Cherubim are guardians, protectors, and messengers of judgment. They gave a message of protection from heaven. Psalm 33:18-19, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon that hope in his mercy; to deliver their souls from death, and to keep them alive in famine." Those outside could not see that protection and blessing. Only by being faithful and in the church can one even come close to understanding such Love and Care. This emphasizes the intricate relationship that worship has with our Salvation. One does not have the loving and caring eyes of God on one if one does not properly worship.

The Cherubim represented judgment to Adam and Eve at their expulsion from the Garden, (Genesis 3:24). So, they demonstrate "the goodness and severity of God," (Romans 11:22).

Cherubim serve God. Their presence indicates the presence of royalty. It is of interest that demons even recognize the deity of Jesus. Mark 1:24, "We ... know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God."

Goat Hair Curtains

These were 30 cubits in length and 4 cubits wide. Four is the number for man. God became man to become the sacrifice. Three times ten shows the triune God completed in the sacrifice.

The taches holding these were brass, not gold. Again, the perseverance of the Man of God in his humanity.

The goat hair curtains covered the cubit that was uncovered by the inner set (v. 7, to be a covering upon the Tabernacle). There were 11 of these instead of the 10 inner curtains. The 11th hung down over the door and doubled back. Thus, 2 cubits of it were always seen. The priest entering the Holy Place was always reminded of man's sin. For the Christian priest it also reminds of the One who died for those sins.

Some think these were from the Angora goat which is white, unlike most sheep in that region of the world were black. In Song of Solomon 1:5, "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon." Bedouin tents were made of black goats'

hair. The curtains in the Tabernacle were probably made of the more costly white Angora. Angora was rare and valuable.

These curtains represent the purifying of the sins of the world that Jesus took upon himself on the cross. Isaiah 1:18, "... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Jesus did not become sin. He only bore our sins, (1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The goat was sacrificed in many of the festivals. They were for a sin offering, (Leviticus 9:3; Numbers 28:15; and Leviticus 16 – the Day of Atonement goats). Christ pictured the goat as the unsaved, (Matthew 25 – those on the left hand).

Jesus took the place of sinners. The sin-bearing substitute was the Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Isaiah 53:4-5 says he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and with his stripes we are healed."

It is interesting that these are called, "the tent," (Exodus 36:14-18; and 35:11).

The Ram Skins Dyed Red

The third set was of Ram's skins dyed red. The ram was an animal of substitution for sin. The ram was used as, 1) a burnt offering, (Leviticus 9:2); 2) a peace offering, (Leviticus 9:4); 3) a consecration offering, (Leviticus 8:22-24); 4) a trespass offering, (Leviticus 5:15-19; Numbers 5:6-8); and 5) a wave offering, (Leviticus 8:18,29).

The ram was given to Abraham to kill instead of Isaac, (Genesis 22:13). Abraham called the place Jehovah-Jireh, meaning God will provide/be seen. The took place on the Mt. Moriah area, where later the Temple was built.

God provided Jesus and his blood on the cross. Exodus 29:31-33 and Leviticus 8:22,29 speak of the "ram of consecration." The priests were to eat the flesh with which "atonement was made, to consecrate them and to sanctify them." Jesus stated, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth," (John 17:19). Revelation 5:9, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood..."

The breast of the ram was waved before the Lord for the consecration of Aaron, (Exodus 29:26-27). Thus, it also represented devotion and consecration.

The Badgers' Skins

The fourth set was badgers' skins. Some say this was either seal or dolphin skins from Egypt. It would become sun bleached and unattractive. It would be a bluish grey in color. If that, it would symbolize the dead bruised body of our Lord. The Septuagint has "skins of a blue color." Many ancient versions of the text indicate it was simply a color rather than the name of an animal. Some think it was a deep blue or violet. If that, all seeing it would see it as a symbol of heaven. This author leans toward it being dolphin.

In Ezekiel 16:10, God said he had "shod thee with badgers' skin" as a way of saying he had sanctified them. By being footwear, it is sure that the hide was very durable. It was able to protect from all types of weather. However, in regards to the Tabernacle, weather was not an issue since the Cloud and Fire Pillar were over them and sheltered them. But it would represent the durability of our Lord while on earth.

This was the covering that could be seen. Christ did not have great looks that would attract followers to him. Isaiah 53:2, "He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire him." "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed him not," (Isaiah 53:3). "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not," (John 1: 10-11).

When beaten and scourged, his body would have had a mixture of sick grey and purplish bruising. Proverbs 20:20, "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly." Christ in the badger covering would present himself as man sees him. But going into the Tent, one would see him as God sees him, a pure heart, (1 Samuel 16:7 – man looks on the outer man, God looks at the heart).

No measurements

No measurements are given for the third and

fourth sets of coverings. This may be intended to communicate that there was no limitation of what Christ was willing to do to cover our sins.

Three verses reference them in an interesting way. In Exodus 25:14, they are called 'a covering.' In Exodus 35:11, they are called 'the coverings.' In Exodus 36:19, they are called 'a covering.' They covered the 'tent' of goats' skins. The blood of the Rams' skins covered the sins of the world seen in the Goats' skins. The plain hide of the fourth covered in the same manner.

Romans 5:8-9, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." 'For us' is from the Greek, *huper*, which means over or above. This verse shows that Jesus was the covering of our sins. Thus, his body and blood were given to cover the sins of the world. As a result, those in the church when in worship, get to see the glories of his heavenly existence by the inner curtain. He was the substitution and he was the covering, the Ram skin.

Four Coverings, Four Divisions

The four coverings can also correspond to the four divisions of the Tabernacle. The Badger skins correlate to the world outside of the Tabernacle wall. The Ram skins correlate to the Court of the Tabernacle where the blood is shed and contacted. The Goat skins correlate to the Holy Place where the righteous gather together for worship. The Fine Linen correlates to the Holy of Holies with the beauty of God and reward for the righteous.

Four Coverings and Jesus

Another way of summarizing the coverings is what they show about Jesus.

A lowly Savior is seen in the Badger skins.

A sacrificial Savior is seen in the Ram skins.

A sinless Savior is seen in the Goat skins.

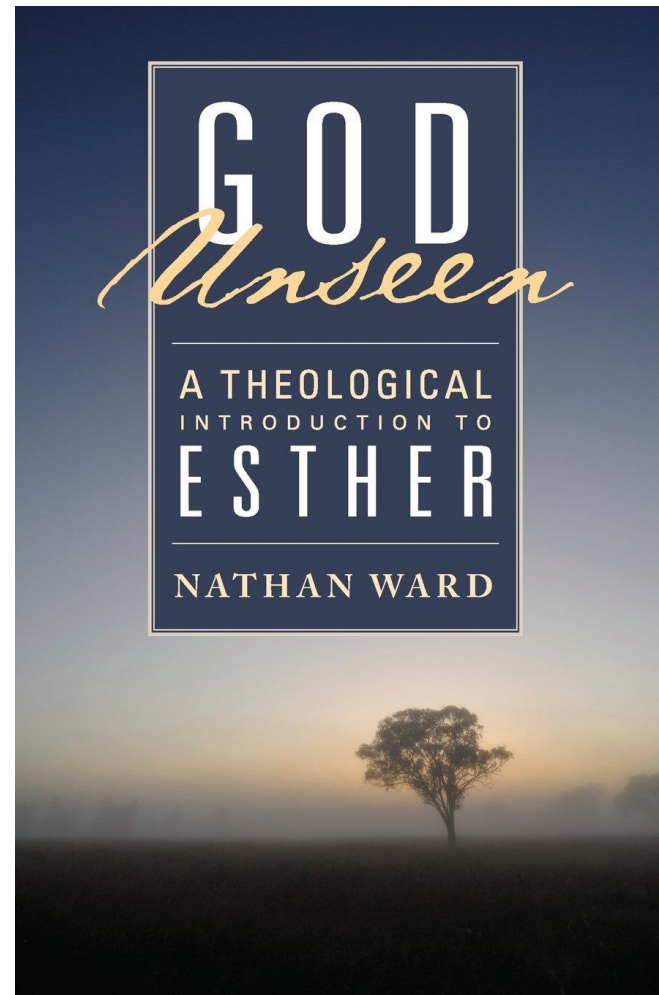
An exalted Savior is seen in the Fine Linen.

GOD UNSEEN: A THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER: A REVIEW.

Samuel Stinson

I had promised a review of Nathan Ward's *God Unseen: An Introduction to the Book of Esther* (DeWard Publishing, 2015) back in 2016. Now, in the fall of 2018, it is time to finally respond. Having read the entire text of the chapters, I must say that I am impressed by the depth and breadth of scholarship presented. The copy of the book I read was a pre-publication proof copy provided by the author. With respect to Esther, a common trope among biblical readers is that the word God, YHWH, etc. is nowhere included in the canonical Hebrew text of the book. Ward claims that the Hebrew text of Esther, though lacking the direct presence of divine language, thematically focuses on the redemptive work of God through the providential care described. Ward's work is a useful, interesting, and well-organized guide to studying contextual and textual matters related to this theme.

Ward supports his claim in the first section of his work by reviewing the various historical and key interpretation issues surrounding Esther. Primary to this work, Ward explores how the Greek versions of Esther generally include extra material that frames Esther through divine language as a means of opposing strictly secular readings of the book. Ward then provides a review of commentators, including Josephus, the Rabbis, and Medieval interpreters that tend toward allegorical/spiritual readings of the text that accomplish a similar function, pushing away from a secular reading of the Hebrew text of Esther using available hermeneutical tools. Ward mentions that early Christians avoided the book, with respect to commentaries, sermons, and studies, though during the reformation period the book received scorn from luminaries such as Luther. Ward touches on issues of canonicity among Jewish and Christian readers, observing that the question of the book's historicity of narrative events is complicated as it revolves around arguing from silence in the work of other



historians, primarily Herodotus.

The primary push for Ward in part two of his work is on the intertextual/ interbiblical way Esther exists in scripture. Put simply, Esther is to be viewed within the context of references that the book makes to other Old Testament books and cultural points, lending credit to the view that the book ought to be viewed considering God's providential care of his people. After all, the web of texts surrounding Esther are themselves highly theologically oriented toward the covenant relationship of God and Israel, so why must this specific divine language exist in every single book, since the overall intertextual relationship points to this understanding?

In chapter five, I find myself most interested in Ward's description of the literary and structural design elements employed in the composition of Esther. In teaching Esther, I have generally pointed to the existence of irony, the plot reversals, and such. But Ward's extensive and systematic treatment of these topics in his work is a helpful guide

for viewing the entirety of the elephant as it were, and not just an ear or a trunk. Esther, it must be said, is perhaps the funniest book of the Bible, possessing a singular self-awareness, wit, and dark gallows humor. The book pivots in its central reversal, as Ward observes in chapter six of his work, on the text of Esther 6. In fact, Ward presents the only extant example I am aware of in which chiasmic structure supports a claim for the Hebrew text of Esther's unity that makes sense without much further digging. But Ward's additional analysis on this structural unity helps to view the Hebrew text considering later Greek additions and expositors' hermeneutical framing in ways that points to the simplicity of design as pointing to God's intervention in history within the canonical text.

The chapter 7 narratological analysis of Esther presents Ward as suggesting this: that providence is not only an aspect of direct language but may be present in the subtext of the work. Ward's focus on

character study in chapter 8 and applications for Christians in chapters 9 and 10 push the work of Esther into the hands of readers today. Readers of Ward's work thus may find encouragement in leading spiritual lives among those with a secular worldview. Rather than be stuck in embracing a worldview in which God is absent, Ward encourages a consideration of the possibility of God's intervention in our humble affairs as a means of understanding providence.

The exegetical work of the appendices may be of use to those interested in a textual-level of analysis of Esther. The proof copy of Ward's book includes a stub for a second appendix centered on a survey of current literature on Esther—while this section is blank, it may be present in final printings, of which I do not have access.

The paperback book is available on Amazon (from 3rd party sellers) for as little as \$2.99.

<https://www.amazon.com/God-Unseen-Theological-Introduction-Esther/dp/1936341808/>

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A REVIEW AND REFLECTION ON “BALANCE” BY IRA NORTH

Jake Schotter

Introduction

Ira North's book has been hailed as a classic book, which is a “must have” in any “church of Christ” library. I have had this book for several years because of this recommendation. Relatively brief, this book is a very fast-paced and easy read. A little child could understand with ease what North is talking about. As will be discussed in this review, North's book does not have Scriptural problems, but it does raise some questions about his dogmatic approach in some of the areas. There is one special area of concern I have with this book that will be discussed in due time.

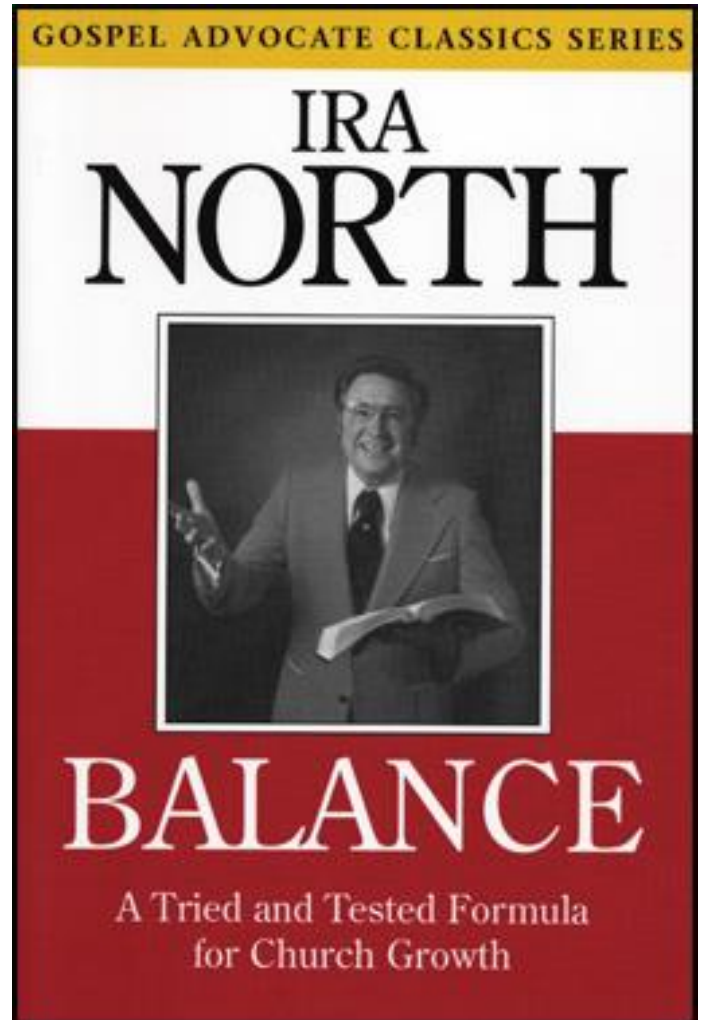
The Formula

North's book has 22 chapters and each is an area of church work he believes a congregation of the Lord's people should really try to focus on, implement, and nurture into productivity. From the very outset, he mentioned the need to follow the pattern of the Early Church, which is noble. In the introduction, he mentioned four things “that gave it a harmonious and beautiful balance”: great teaching, great outreach, great benevolence, and a great mindset (p. 12). These things focus on every aspect of the Lord's church from the inside to the outside, and done right, can make a great impact. North notes “So much depends upon the pulpit. If the educational program is to be strong and vibrant, it must have encouragement from the pulpit” (13).

Throughout North's tenure at Madison, he learned several lessons, and here are ten broad categories we can describe this congregation with.

1. Attitude

The people need to have an attitude that includes “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Chapter 8 is an entire chapter devoted this concept (pp. 57-62). North commented on attitude's effect on the atmosphere of a congregation: “Any con-



gregation of the church on earth, whether it meets in a magnificent building costing \$10 million or in a humble garage, can build an atmosphere conducive to church growth” (25).

2. Allowance

North is a major advocate of church programs, especially with the youth. Therefore, he will go “all out for the youth” (p 109-118). If someone comes along with an idea for a program to reach people and help them out, he is willing to give it a chance because of the good it could do. To do this, they are willing to give and budget an allowance to programs. He frowned upon the church building that gets used less than five hours a week. They do two services instead of one in a larger building to save money for other projects.

3. Activity

Involvement of individual members is an expectation. He wants everyone to be active in the

congregation. The fourth chapter deals with this beautifully. North stresses the need for delegation and involvement. He wrote on page 28, “Every congregation ought to have a program of work so broad, so deep, so wonderful that every member can find a place in which he can use his talents to the glory of God and the good of mankind.” He also used the idea, “Activity stimulates activity, and inactivity stimulates inactivity” (pp. 131, 136).

4. Acclimation

In a large congregation, you will not know everyone. However, if you find a group of people you are comfortable with, you will feel just as at home as if you knew everyone. If every age group finds people who are like-minded and enjoy being around them, that is wonderful! Again, he really emphasizes giving attention to the youth, and one way he facilitated this was through Bible camp every summer, in chapter 15.

5. Accomplishment

Madison was very successful in establishing programs and having people contribute and help with them. They are a very accomplished congregation. This is reminiscent of the quote on activity breeding activity and inactivity doing the same. These people had a mind to work.

6. Aggressiveness

It seemed as if the church building was never really closed down because there was always something going on. They were not only being the church, but they quickly became a hub of activity—from being a safe place for young teenagers to hosting adult studies frequently. They were busy working for the Lord... all the time.

7. Agreeability

There were some programs that might not have been the most popular with those outside the Madison congregation. However, if there was a major decision to be made and discussion was required, they did. They were adamant “that nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, should disturb the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Let the minority give in to the majority in all matters of judgment. We must get along and love each other and boost each other, and give in on matters of judgment. In matters of faith we are one, in matters of opinion

let there be liberty, and in all things let there be love” (p. 117).

8. Accessibility

I mentioned that Madison sought to be a safe place where school children could go and have a good time. That means little children and teenagers were knowledgeable about where they could go for this to occur. This made the church accessible, open to the community. People were able to go there for other things, as well, no doubt.

9. Aura

Many of us have associated the Madison church of Christ with success and Ira North. However, that was not their goal. North mentioned a little girl who understood what Madison was all about when she asked him, “Mr., is this the church [t]hat helps people?” (p. 56). Truly, all that they did was to seek people who needed help. Inside the church and outside its walls.

10. Assistance

Perhaps the bottom line is this: Ira North and the Madison church of Christ congregation were able to be so successful and able to experience great church growth because they were willing to assist people with their spiritual needs as well as their physical needs. This is seen in their benevolence and outreach programs that we described previously (and it is described much more in-depth in the book). When churches assist, they are showing that not only do they know something about Jesus, they love like Him too. That's what every Christian and congregation should seek to accomplish.

The Fumble

As good as this book is, I am alarmed by the “aftermath.” In their heyday, Madison was around 5,000 members—a great number in any membership roll! Surely, one would think, with their great emphasis on balance of authenticity with the truth and assistance with daily tools, they would maintain several thousand. However, they have not. According to the 2018 church directory, they have around 750 members. That is still a very good and sizeable number, but nowhere near what they once were. According to this accurate statistic, they have lost over 80% of their membership.

One of my concerns with this book is its em-

phasis on “you must have a 25 to 30 minute sermon.” If you go over, you're arrogant and wasting time. He took the absolutist position, “You can excuse long, drawn out services and defend them all you want, but while you do it your crowds will dwindle away and your future will be impaired” (p. 38). I understand having a general pattern and being respectful of time limits (i.e. guest preaching), but to be that resolute in belief is wrong.

I need to go further with an example North gave. A visiting preacher went a little longer than normal. How much longer and how it went down can be discussed and understood from Madison's perspective. However, their reaction was he “preached on and on and on.” He further said, “Since people who come regularly did not expect such a thing, they were worn out and disappointed. One lady stopped an elder and said, ‘You (the elders) have ruined my day and dinner. I thought we would have service as usual, and I set my oven with that in mind. The next time you are going to pull a stunt like this, please let us know’” (pp. 38-39).

What a disgusting attitude! They became so accustomed to doing something one way, that if they

dare to study God's Word and praise Him any longer, they throw a fit! On the other hand, I know of Grace Community Church where John MacArthur preaches. He normally preaches for an hour, and their services go for an hour-and-a-half. They continue to have 10,000 people every Sunday in their two morning services and it has continued to grow and stabilize for the past 40 years outside the Bible belt in California. In addition, MacArthur is a Calvinist, which some consider to be a harsher theology. This is certainly something to think about.

Conclusion

I will recommend this book, with some reservations as detailed above. I must emphasize that this should not be made a universal formula, as each congregation is unique and its focus is on outreach and bringing people in, not keeping them.

[*Balance: A Tried and Tested Formula for Church Growth* is available from Gospel Advocate bookstore at www.GospelAdvocate.com, or Amazon.com.]

The time of my death is near.

I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the race.

I have kept the faith.

Therefore, a crown of righteousness is laid up for me. The Lord, the righteous judge, will give it to me in that day, but not to me only. He will give a crown to all who love his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (Hugo McCord Translation)

About the Authors

Travis Anderson grew up in Southwest Missouri, attended Brown Trail School of Preaching, and now preaches in East Peoria, IL. loves being the father of his two children, the husband of his wife, playing softball/baseball, and doing the work of a minister.

Kevin Barham is a Christian and a lawyer (yes, believe it or not, such a person does exist!), former restaurant owner, who also preaches any time he has the opportunity. He is also a *Muscle and a Shovel* connoisseur, having created a 9-session class on using it to evangelize. He is currently running for Circuit Judge, and would appreciate your vote if you are among the 17,890 people living in Franklin County, Arkansas.

Dewayne Bryant is the minister for the New York Ave. church of Christ in Arlington, TX. He has served as a professor of Bible for four different schools and works as both a minister and as a Christian apologist for Apologetics Press and the Apologia Institute.

Gantt Carter lives in Elk City, OK, with his wife (Julie), and their two growing children. He preaches for the 2nd & Adams congregation, enjoys martial arts and fishing, teaches online Bible classes, and was one of the stars of an underappreciated YouTube show about FBI agents.

Gerald Cowan earned degrees from Freed-Hardeman College, Lambuth University, and Harding Graduate School of Religion. He has preached the gospel to which he is committed for a bit more than 60 years. He is also committed to short-term missions, focusing for the past 22 years on the European country of Albania (Biblical Illyricum). He and his wife Neda have produced children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Though he was a late comer to the gospel and a late bloomer as well, an underachieving writer,

and is considered a lame duck by many, he steadfastly resists retirement, is still a student, and glad to be called a preacher.

David Dean serves the church of Christ in Fouke Arkansas. He divides his time between studying God's Word, preparing for sermons and bible classes, and spending as much time as he can with his wife and two children. In whatever time is left David can be found with a book in his hand and a cup of coffee!

Jason Floyd is one of the few people in this world for whom "talking about the weather" is actually an important topic. His role as a weather-watcher at the Albany, NY, airport requires it. He and his wife, Sarah, homeschool their two sons. Jason preaches for the church in Bennington, Vermont. They are quite adept at making elderberry syrup (which, I hear, is great for fighting off sickness).

Kyle Frank is a disabled workaholic whose idea of fun is spending twelve hours a day reading the American Standard Version (of 1901), Restoration Movement biographies, sermons, and seeing how many writing projects he can keep going at once. He also runs So and So Publishing.

Joshua Hames has been the Hispanic minister at Crestview church of Christ in Boaz, Alabama, since 2011. He's the author of 3 books and counting. A former carpenter turned accountant, he currently processes all invoicing for the fire hydrant capital of the world (look for the word "Albertville" in the next casting you see). He is a husband, and the father of two beautiful blessings from God. He takes great pleasure in propagating and growing plants, and reading about the social sciences, literature, history, and economics. You can find him at: DiggingInTheWord.com.

Bill Howard is a former elder, preacher, and restaurateur who spends his “retired” time writing detective novels and study books for new Christians, as well as encouraging others and supporting the new elders where he attends in Dale, Oklahoma.

William Howard is looking for a catchier name. He wants a cool pseudonym but they have all been taken. He thought of making up something unpronounceable and decided upon the name Friedrich Nietzsche, only to find it had been taken by a lunatic from the 19th century.

John Krivak is a constant student of the Bible and church history, especially the Restoration Movement and Alexander Campbell. He studied Bible and Biblical Languages at Harding University. He can be contacted via email by using jkrivak@zoominternet.net.

Richard Mansel is a preacher, writer, book-lover (whose passion lately is histories focused on World War II), and former editor of *Forthright Magazine*.

Joseph McWhorter is an Alabama native turned Texan. He is a graduate of the Southwest School of Biblical Studies in Austin, and preaches for the Canyon Lake church of Christ. He and his wife, Michelle, are currently raising two dogs, multiple chickens, and the occasional stray cat.

Mark McWhorter is an overachiever, a finder of treasure, explorer of old and significant houses, occasional dumpster-diver, and an expert in everything from open-heart surgery to Russian politics. (And you think I’m making this stuff up...)

Jake Schotter loves studying the Bible, reading books, preaching (since 2009), and writing about the Truth. He has been very fortunate to grow his library to over 2,500 books and loves ordering them cheaply. He is a sophomore Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University.

Michael Shank is a former electrician who wrote a book called *Muscle and a Shovel*, describing his conversion to the Lord, and another, *When Shovels Break*, that shows that Christians who fell away can come back to the Christ. He’s written a third book, but you’ll have to look at the ad at the end of his article to see what it is. He is currently getting acclimated to the higher elevations since moving to Colorado.

Samuel Stinson began preaching shortly after he obeyed the gospel in Kentucky in 2004. He has preached in Florida, Kansas, West Virginia, and Nevada and is currently teaching college English.

Jim Stutts is a retired preacher, a retired UPS big-truck driver, and likes classic automobiles. He is also an encourager of preachers. He lives with his wife in Florida, where they like being near the kids and grandkids.

Kenny Taylor is another one of those unfortunate souls who wasn’t asked to provide his bio (someone fire the editor!). And though one could be made up, we thought we’d be nice and just leave it as-is.

Joey Treat is a missionary to Micronesia, along with his wife, Tammy, and their three children. In addition to preaching and working with lost souls on the mission field, he is also a famous Alex Trebek impersonator.

Bradley S. Cobb was really hoping to have this issue mailed out on time, but apparently Roundhouse, a rental house, visiting people’s houses, loading boxes on UPS trucks that deliver to people’s houses, and sleeping in his own house took precedence. He keeps telling himself that one day he will be caught up enough to finish writing that commentary on Revelation. Until then, he will have to keep listening to podcasts about productivity and hoping they stick.