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The Quarterly

Vol. 5, No. 1

LOVE YOUR
(POLITICAL)
ENEMIES

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The Quarterly

Volume 5 – Number 1 – January 2021

FAVORITES

If you read this section of the *Quarterly*, you know that I don't hide the "behind-the-scenes" stuff from you. Whether the issue is late (my fault), or an article got put in an issue later than it should've been (my fault), or...well, you get the idea. Someone (I don't think I should name names) forgot to assign topics to the writers, and so somewhat last minute, this person quickly requested they send their favorite (or latest) sermon for publication. So, in case you wondered why there wasn't more of a "theme" to this issue, now you know.

If you are still reading, and you want some suggestions on where to start, I think you might consider starting with the editorial, dealing with a **much** needed lesson: Love Your (Political) Enemies. Scott Harp touches on "Our Protest." Gerald Cowan's "Old Age is not a Disease" is definitely worth taking the time to peruse. Mark McWhorter's "We Preach the Miraculous Birth" is filled with interesting information (you'll find the many portions in parentheses to be fascinating, I believe). John Krivak shares some lessons learned (and not learned) from the supposed discovery of the bones of Peter.

We also have an article all about a non-profit run by true Christians who help members of the church afford adoptions. We would appreciate you taking the time to read about it, pray for them, and spread the word about the great benefit they are to families looking to adopt.

There are also previously unpublished poems by Gus Nichols, Ted Knight, and Gerald Cowan.

And for those who want to dive into the deeper end of the theological pool, Paul Pollard's article on the phrase "Pistis Christou" ("faith of Christ"), how it should be translated, and the theological implications of that translation should be enjoyable.

Honestly, almost every issue I feel like I ought to just give the whole table of contents and recommend each article. So don't let the fact that I didn't mention some specifically on page 1 keep you from reading them.

You know what, I'm going to even suggest that you read the "Quotes to Contemplate" section, if for no other reason than to read about a brother who was ... well, I'd better not give it away right here.

Also, we hope you enjoy the cover image for this issue, which was created by Paul Cobb.

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*

WHAT TO FIND AND WHERE TO FIND IT

(AKA: The Contents of the Quarterly)

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LOVE YOUR (POLITICAL) ENEMIES

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

Introduction:

Jesus has gathered a bunch of people around Him, up on a mountain, where He is teaching them. And though that was 2,000 years ago, what He said there in Matthew 5, starting in verse 43 has a direct application to our lives today, here in America, where there is hatred, fear, anger, lies, more lies, “cancelling,” and division.

You have heard that it has been said, “Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, “Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.” For He makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

If you just love them who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brethren, what do you do that’s more than others? Don’t the tax collectors do the same thing? Therefore, be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

You, yes you, the one reading this article—do you have emotions? Do you ever get mad at someone? Have you ever hated someone? It’s so easy to say, “They made me mad,” and try to excuse any reaction you may have. But ask yourself honestly: *How should I respond to this person?*

You look at this country, you look at what is going on politically—and it’s not just in the last month, or the last year, or the last twelve years—you can easily see a constant stream, from one side and from the other, of accusations about how evil the other side is. Republicans hate the Democrats because they’re evil. Democrats hate the Republicans because they’re evil. If you don’t believe me, just ask them, and they’ll tell you.

But what’s worse, is that it has gotten into the church.

There are Christians who have gotten so caught up in the political spirit of the age, that they now have people who they instantly hate, instantly view as an enemy, whom they’ve never met. Ask many Democrats to pray for Donald Trump, and see their reaction. Some people will gladly do it, and others will think you’re crazy for even daring to suggest such a horrid idea. Ask many Republicans to pray for Obama, or for Biden, and you will likely see the same reaction.

I remember one time, sitting in the worship service, and somebody got up to do the Wednesday night devotional, and started off with the words, “The truth shall set you free. But free from what? Free from Democrats? We can only hope.” Look, regardless of your political affiliation, or how much you love one party

over another—*that's not right*. We are to love one another.

We are to love one another—even if we consider them our enemies. Now, brothers and sisters in Christ should never be enemies. We should always show love for one another. Period. End of story.

If there are people who are enemies politically, people we disagree with politically. We're still supposed to love them. Bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us. We're not supposed to try to undermine them, from one side or the other.

If you're on one side the political aisle, you probably believe that the election was stolen from the rightful winner by various means of widespread fraud. If you're on the other side of the aisle, you probably believe that there was an attempt to steal the election through false accusations of widespread fraud. Either way, you have people who are at each other's throats—and you'll never hear them say, "Let's treat them nicely. Let's do kind things for the other side who is trying to undermine the American election system, instead of condemning them, instead of hating them." Neither side seems willing to budge and do what the Scriptures teach.

Obviously you understand that not all Republicans hate all Democrats, and that not all Democrats hate all Republicans. There are good people who support each party. And if you don't know any, come visit me and I'll introduce you to some. But what we're seeing in this country right now, what's being put out on the news, put out on social media, is the extremes of both sides. And when that's all that is seen ("Oh, look at those evil Trump supporters," or "Look at those left-wing rioters"), it stirs people up into a frenzy of anxiety, anger, fear, etc. We are being trained to think that everybody that disagrees with us politically is an enemy. And even if we think that, remember this:

Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

Who's Your Father?

Why? Why Jesus? Why should we do this??? Jesus tells us:

So that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus, in John chapter 8, made an interesting statement. Let's get a quick background: He was talking to some Jews who really disagreed with Him. They didn't like Him. They were Jesus' political enemies. Starting in verse 32, Jesus said to them: *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free*. They, being quite taken aback by these words, said, *We are Abraham's seed. We've never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, "You shall be made free?"*

Here's where I take a quite side-trip. Have you ever noticed that some people have no concept of history? They don't know the history of their own country, of their own people? They said, *We are Abraham's seed. We've never been in bondage to anyone...* Well, that's 100% true, if you don't count Egypt...or Assyria...or Babylon...or the Moabites...or the Amorites...or the Greeks...or maybe *Rome*—the country that was ruling over them when Jesus was talking to them.

These political enemies of Jesus were so opposed to Him that they were denying history—rewriting history—to try to make their argument against Jesus. And Jesus replied:

Truly, truly I say to you, "Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin."

Jesus wasn't even talking about *national* oppression, He was talking about *spiritual* oppression. These people were slaves to sin.

I know you are Abraham's seed, but you are seeking to kill me, because my word has no place in you.

Let's take this and place it in today's American context. Are there those who want to shut the mouth of anyone who disagrees with them, by whatever means possible? Maybe it is by shouting them down, or trying to shame them ("How can you call yourself a Christian and vote for *that guy*?"). Maybe it is purging people from social media platforms ("We can't allow people to question the election results"). If we have that attitude, then we're just like the people who fought against Jesus.

After pointing out their murderous intentions, Jesus then makes this interesting statement (I told you it was coming):

I speak what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.

Did you catch that? Jesus makes it clear that *His* Father isn't the same as *their* father. 'We ain't got the same Father.' Oh, they haven't figured out what Jesus is talking about, but they're going to.

They said, "Abraham is our Father." Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, you'd do the things he did. As it is, you're determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I learned from God [my Father]. Abraham never did such things [as you are doing]. You're doing the things your own father does.

They argue with Him again, perhaps insulting Jesus in the process ("We weren't born from fornication..."). They then claimed God as their Father. That's when Jesus came out and made clear what He had been hinting at the whole time:

If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God. I didn't come from myself, He sent me. Why do you not understand my speech? It's because you don't want to listen to my words.

***You are of your father, the devil.** And you will do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, He didn't live in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, because he is a liar, and the father of lies. So when I tell you the truth, you do not believe me.*

Jesus basically says to them, *I* do the will of *my* Father, and *you* do the will of *your* father. You are not children of the Father, and it is evident by the way you're acting. You are children of Satan.

Back to Loving Our Enemies...

So, back to Matthew 5, remember that Jesus said we are to *Love* our enemies, *Bless* those who curse us, *Do Good* to those who hate us, *Pray* for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. And the reason why is **SO THAT WE MAY BE CHILDREN OF THE FATHER.**

If we truly want to be children of God, then we have to live like God wants us to live—which includes not hating but loving, not cursing but blessing, not doing evil again but doing good and praying for our enemies—INCLUDING OUR POLITICAL ENEMIES.

If you only love those who *agree* with you, then you're no better than your enemies—who do the same thing! We have to show love to those who we disagree with politically.

If we're just going to spew out hatred, if we're going to do everything we can to show that we're better than those evil people on the other side, then we are being hypocrites! Late in Jesus' sermon (Matthew 7:1ff), he says:

Judge not so that you won't be judged, because whatever level of judgment you use on others, the same level will judge you.

If you hold somebody to one standard, and you don't hold yourself to the same standard—if you condemn the other side for their attitudes, for spouting out lies, for their refusal to listen to your side, when you are doing the same thing, or having the same attitude—then you are a hypocrite, and you will be judged by that same standard you hold others to. If you try to hold someone to a standard higher than God's standard, or judge them harsher than God will (by adding extra laws, like the Pharisees, binding traditions, etc.), then God will hold you to the same hypocritical standard. No loopholes.

You've heard about Jesus' illustration of a man trying to get a dust speck out of someone's eye while he's got a long hunk of lumber sticking out of his own eye. That's us. That's each and every person who—because he thinks he has the right position (politically or otherwise)—decides he is going to point out the sins in other people, while casting a blind eye to his own sins. Jesus never said the other guy didn't need that speck removed from his eye. He's clear, that guy has problems, and you have a problem. But focus on yourself first. Get yourself right first.

This principle holds true in your daily life. In your normal interactions. In political talk. In marriage relationships. It applies *everywhere*. There is no area of life that is exempt.

We can't let things of this world become so influential in our lives that we are willing to act like the world to fight for them. We can't get to the point where politics becomes more important to you than living for Jesus. If you see a Christian screaming, yelling, hating those who disagree with him politically then what is he doing?

Sinning.

What about...?

Peter, by inspiration, told Christians to *honor the king*. And if you're a Christian in the first century, and you read that, you might be tempted to reply, "Peter, are you nuts? What on earth do you mean, *honor the king*? Maybe you haven't heard about that young man he castrated and then married. Maybe you haven't heard about that fire he set and them blamed on us. Maybe you haven't heard about how he had our brethren covered in tar and flammable materials, hung up on a pole, and set on fire to light that maniac's garden. No, Peter, you've lost what little mind you had left! We will never show respect or honor to the king! We will call him names instead! We will make fun of his looks and how he talks. We will drag his family through the mud. We will accuse him of financial improprieties. We will make vindictive memes about him!"

If God expected his children to honor *NERO*, who was in every possible way an *enemy* to Christianity as a whole and Christians individually—how on earth can anyone today claim to be a Christian while dishonoring the leader of their own country. How can you claim to be a child of God if you aren't willing to pray for the President (whether you voted for him or not), to bless him (whether you like him or not), to love him (whether or not you like his policies)?

But what keeps us from doing this? I asked earlier if you ever had emotions. It is emotions that cloud our mind and keep us from obeying God. I've been there. I've yelled, I've screamed, I've said some not-very-nice things about people as I cut them off on the interstate. It was something I shouldn't have done—and it was sin. At those times, I failed to be a child of God, because I was not loving my enemies.

If we want to see any peace in this country—if we want to see any peace between people of different political persuasions, it is not coming from a political solution. An election is not going to fix it. What will fix it is people acting like Christ. The only way we will change this country, change the mood of the country, for the better, is to reach out to people, reach out to them individually and converting them, one by one, to Jesus.

As more people become Christians guess what happens—you end up with a better country. The more people willing to follow Christ, to follow the Scriptures, the more peace there will be in the country. It is our job to take the gospel of peace to them—not anyone else's.

I promise you, I PROMISE YOU, I would bet everything I own on this—I promise you that neither Republican nor Democrat (or any other political party) is going to put forth a bill that says, "We demand that all people in the United States of America hear the gospel, believe it, repent of their sins, confess Jesus, and be baptized and live according to the word of God." I promise you, *that* will never be put into the congressional record. It's not up to the state, it's not up to the country to force Christianity on people. The only way we can change the world is to reach out to people with the gospel and let it change their hearts.

And the only way we can do that is if we live it. After all, a loud, hate-filled Republican isn't ever going to convince a Democrat to change parties or to see things his way. A loud, hate-filled Democrat is never going to convince a Republican to change parties or to see things his way. A loud, hate-filled Christian is never going to be able to convince a non-Christian to submit to Jesus. Instead, that person is just going to bring about more hate.

Do you love your enemies—even the political ones? Do you bless your enemies—even the political ones? Do you pray for your enemies—even the political ones?

If you don't, you have no right to say that you are a child of God.

A Preacher's Prayer

Ted Knight

Dear Lord...

Well here I am again, Lord,
Comin' to you in prayer.
I hope I ain't pesterin' you none,
But I know you're always there.

You see, Lord, I need a little extra help
To preach to folks today,
So I just hope you'll lend your ear
To what I have to say.

I've heard a little gossip, Lord,
That's been goin' round about me.
Aw, I know I shouldn't listen, Lord,
But it still hurts some, you see.

Lord, all I want to do in this life
Is to preach the best I can
And do my best along the way
To help some fallen man.

Some won't like the things I do,
Nor listen to what I say,
And I guess I'll make some enemies
Somewhere along the way.

So Lord, that's why I'm prayin' now
And countin' so much on you.
I'll just keep lookin' to you, Lord,
To always see me through.

So when I get up to preach today, Lord,
Will you give me a little extra power,
And let me lean on your shoulder, Lord,
Through this trying hour?

I know I can't please everybody, Lord,
But maybe just a few
Will hear some word that will prick their heart
And come and follow you.

And Lord, when the time comes that
The sun of my life has gone down,
It'll really mean a lot to me
To know I'm heaven-bound.

So if you'll just bear with me, Lord,
And help me all you can,
I'll be a mighty happy fellow,
And a mighty grateful man.

I know these things ain't so big to you,
But it helps to get 'em off my chest.
So if you'll just keep on listening, Lord,
I'll keep on doin' my best.



OUR PROTEST

SCOTT HARP

Introduction

We prize our freedom to protest in America. It is part of what makes America for the people and by the people. Annually we salute our veterans who make protesting possible.

What does “protest” mean? In noun form, it is a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something. In verb form it is to *express* an objection to what someone has said or done.

Protests are not new. They have been going on since the dawn of time. October 31, 1517 – Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the doors of the Wittenburg church in Mainz, Germany, protesting against the powers and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church – starting the *protestant* revolution. This was made easier, because 63 years before – the Gutenberg press came into being, helping to enable the wide distribution of protest letters and literature.

Before that – in Acts 2 – Peter and the 11 protest against sin and its control.

God led a revolution with one Roman cross. Look at the life of Jesus – and his efforts to pull off a victory over sin (e.g. Temptations in Mark 4, Jewish rejection (John 8:44), leading to his death). People have always struggled against the dominion of Satan since Eden!

What has God put in place that we may stay the course of our protest against sin?

Our Perceptive Powers

God made us able to determine right from wrong. What is true or not.

Our perceptive powers – John 4:19 – The woman at the well perceived he was a prophet; John 20:30, 31.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;’ (Hebrews 10:5)

He’s made a body for us to do something great as well. God gave proof: Moses told Israel:

“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.” (Deuteronomy 4:32–35)

Taking Our Stand With God

Jesus protested against sin, His apostles did as well. Are we taking the same stand? Are we standing with God and protesting against sin?

Take the time to look up these verses, and see

how they apply to your stand with God: Psalm 119:105; Acts 2:42.

The New Testament is a sure and tested way to discern what is right. Prove all things, cling to what is good.

We have not space to go into detail, but consider these examples of great reformers and restorationists taking their stand with God. Hezekiah – 2 Kings 18; Isaiah 36; and Josiah – 2 Kings 22.

Will we join HIS protest?

Set yourself apart for service to God:

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (Romans 12:1)

To put on a united front:

"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Don't let vanity make you miss this:

"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in

vain." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

Heed the exhortation:

"I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly." (Hebrews 13:22)

Contend for the faith:

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 1:3)

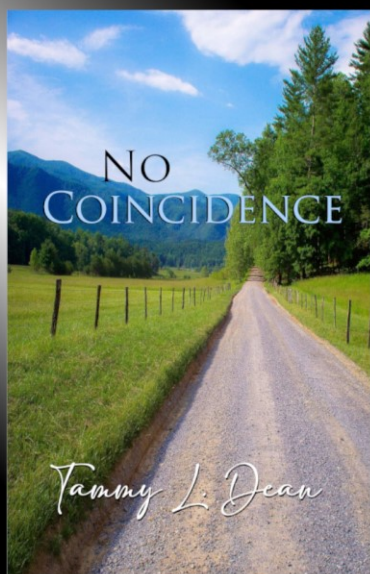
Conclusion

See yourself in God's protest for right!

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20)

"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." (Romans 16:17)

"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf" (Romans 15:30).



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Old Age is not a Disease

RIGHT ATTITUDES ABOUT THE EFFECTS, LIMITATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SPECIAL QUALITIES OF OLD AGE

Gerald Cowan

I have noticed an old man who is apparently stalking me. Sometimes I see his reflection in store windows and mirrors, and his appearance is unsettling, unnerving, disconcerting. I may see him ever so briefly but it can spoil my mood, sometimes for a whole day. I'm sure that others have noticed him too. Short, pale and blotchy skin, thin gray hair, sagging jowls, puffy eyes, thick in the waist and hips, and sometimes a little unsteady on his feet. Sometimes I catch his eye and we look at each other a long time, but he never speaks – and I don't often start a conversation with a person I really don't want to know or associate with. Some kinds of light are very revealing – like the light in the men's room in our church's building, and the light in my bathroom at home. When I see this old guy in any place, I just want to get away. Of course I can't get away from him, but I can fix it so that I don't have to see him.

Most of us probably dread anything – disease, accident, old age, senility – anything that limits our ability to function effectively, or limits our enjoyment of life. The typical American dreads old age and does not look forward to it. Many refuse to “make the best of it” and are terribly frustrated and unhappy when the body wears out or becomes dysfunctional. People who have suffered some crippling disease often focus resentfully upon what they have lost and not appreciatively on what they still have left. It doesn't have to be that way: we can learn to accept, maybe even appreciate, the changes in our physical, mental, and emotional capacities. When we do, it will make life more pleasant for us, and will certainly make the situation more pleasant for those around us.

I had intended to combine **old age** and **physical disabilities/handicaps** in this essay, but I decided there are too many differences in the categories.

There are actually two groups of attitudes about the problems of old or advancing age: your attitude toward your own advancing age, and your attitude toward others who are old or growing old.

The several aims of the lesson: To get us to show elderly persons the consideration, honor, and respect they deserve. To get us to be honorable, respectable, and deserving of consideration as we grow old. To help us enjoy increasing age in ourselves and others. We will emphasize three things: The effects of age upon the person. How to involve older people in our activities more effectively. How to prepare oneself for advancing age – how to look to the future rather than dream about the past.

OLD AGE IS NOT A DISEASE. IT SHOULD BE HONORED.

Age is chronological. It is not a state of mind or how you look or feel. Lying about it doesn't change it. Some would prefer not to use the term *old folks*. You may glower and glare at it, but chronological age increases inexorably, no matter how one feels or what one denies. You may take several years off your appearance with makeup or surgery but it does not change your age. Those commercial advertisements that promise to “take ten years off your age” are lying to you, promising something that is not only irrational but impossible. Changing your apparent age with makeup or other means is just another way to lie about your age.

In some cultures age is measured correctly: one is nine months old at birth. Life begins at the point of conception. But that kind of honesty is not attractive to many. You'd reach “old age” nine months sooner! Old age is sometimes called the age of social insecurity. That may be an apt description of the condition. It might also be called the misunderstood

age, the unappreciated age, the lonely age, the ugly age, the age most dreaded and detested. You seldom hear any but commercial advertisers talking about “the golden years” of the “silver-haired.”

America is a generally youth-oriented society. Old age certainly gets in the way for fun-loving and action-seeking people. The only way to avoid getting old is to die young. To stop getting older you must die now. Most of us do not find that to be a very attractive or welcome alternative. We ought to respect and appreciate age and maturity, and show appropriate honor to older persons, especially in the home.

The purpose of this essay is not only to seek proper honor for older people, but also to encourage older people to feel better about themselves. To accomplish our purpose we will note: (1) Some of the effects of age upon the person – to promote understanding and empathy. (2) How to make better and more effective use of the talents and resources of old people. (3) How to prepare oneself for old age – how to keep on planning for the future rather than dreaming about the past and wishing you could relive it.

THE EFFECTS OF ADVANCING AGE ON THE BODY, MIND, EMOTIONS, AND ATTITUDES OF THE PERSON.

Effects on the body. This is the most obvious, and generally most distressing. The senses go. Eyesight and hearing are no longer keen. Taste goes flat. The flesh gets flabby, with poor muscle tone. One's shape literally goes to pot and settles most unbecomingly downward. Wrinkled and leathery skin; graying wispy hair. Most difficult to adjust to is the reduced energy level and loss of physical strength, agility, and dexterity. One simply cannot do what he used to.

Effects on the mind. Diminishing ability to learn and understand or utilize new ideas and information. Failing memory. Old people can often remember clearly the words, events, and affairs of long ago, but can't remember what happened last week, whether they took their medicine today, or how many times they have told you the same story. That is often annoying to impatient young people. But when it is pointed out it is terribly embarrassing and distressing to the old person who is guilty of it.

Effects on the emotions, attitudes, and disposition. Some people tend to ripen with age: kinder, gentler, sweeter, more understanding and sym-

thetic, more helpful, more tolerant, more appreciative and loving. Of course there are some who seem to develop the negative side too. They turn sour. They tend to become hard, bitter, and resentful, unsympathetic and unkind, contrary and difficult, intolerant, demanding, unappreciative, selfish, and never satisfied – it is sometimes impossible to please them, much less to satisfy them. Who wants to spend time with such people? Mind you, these qualities are not restricted to any age group. But they seem to be more pronounced in older people.

But there are some positive qualities too, excellent qualities of mind and emotion that are gained only through long life and experience.

Wisdom. Not just knowledge; more than the mere accumulation of information. Wisdom is the ability to make appropriate use of one's knowledge, to apply the facts (Psalm 90:12). It is the ability to separate the important from the unimportant, the relevant from the irrelevant. It is ability to simplify.

Patience. Patience is the ability to endure without breaking, to hold on without giving up or giving in – without quitting or yielding to pressure. Patience comes only by enduring, by being successful in responding to trials, troubles, and temptations (James 1:2-4, 12). It takes a long time to grow old. It is proverbial: the impatience of youth and the patience of old age. It takes time to learn how to wait, to let things take their normal or required course.

Experience of events, circumstances, and situations. There are no shortcuts.

Understanding comes most often and most directly by experience. The whole Bible book of Ecclesiastes is written to prove that point. The author experienced everything and tried everything for himself, in order to answer the basic question: “What is best for men to do all the days of their lives?”

Sympathy and empathy – a special understanding and feeling for the human condition – come more realistically through experience (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Hope. The fulfillment of our desire and expectation of being with Christ come closer as we pass through life and approach the end of life (Romans 8:24, 5:3-5).

Faith. The unshakable conviction that God is, and that He rewards those who seek Him diligently (Hebrews 11:6). Trust in the integrity of God grows with the passage of time. It takes time to prove (in

one's own life) that God is true to himself and to His people. "I was young and now am old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken..." (Psalm 37:25). Confidence that victory is possible and the end will be good (Romans 8:28-29, 37-39).

EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE! OLDER PEOPLE ARE A VALUABLE RESOURCE IN THE HOME, COMMUNITY, AND CHURCH.

Some have made significant contributions to mankind and to the cause of God in the later years of their lives. Here are a few of many examples that could be presented.

In arts, science, politics: Michelangelo painted his masterpiece, *The Last Judgment*, at age 86. Immanuel Kant produced some of his best philosophical works after age 74. Tennyson's great insightful poem, *Crossing the Bar*, was written at age 80. William Gladstone mastered a new language at 70, and became England's Prime Minister for the fourth time at 83.

In religion: Moses led the nation of Israel out of Egypt at age 80, and continued as their leader, judge, and prophet until age 120. John wrote the Gospel, the Revelation, and his three epistles at age 80-95.

In the church: Older, experienced, and wiser men are asked to serve as elders, overseers of the local congregation. Never young men or newcomers to the faith (1 Timothy 3:1-7, especially 3:6, and Titus 1:5-11). Older people set an example for and give guidance to younger ones (Titus 2:2-5). Any church that does not use its older members properly is wasting one of its most valuable resources. No doubt one of the greatest wastes in the church today is the failure to use young people properly, to train them up and help them become productive. But sometimes a much greater waste is the failure to use and benefit from the experience, wisdom, and ability of its older members, both male and female.

In the home: Older people are the pioneers of the family. Raise an Ebenezer to them (1 Samuel 7:12). It is demeaning to think of parents and grandparents as built-in babysitters. Their experience and insight, and their patience, are of great value in stabilizing the family and helping younger members to cope with life. Honor, physical and financial support, personal respect and courtesy are already deserved and do not have to be earned again by continued productivity, etc. Small children have no concept of age, especially of its limitations. But

when they become able to understand, they must be taught to appreciate and respect age. Teach them that, if they stay alive, they too will grow old. Few things are more detestable and dishonorable than an ungrateful child or grandchild who takes all he can get, then abandons parents and grandparents, turns away from them, refuses to acknowledge any debt or obligation to love, respect, or help them. They say, "I'm going out on my own now, so you are on your own too." These shriveled up humans had better not produce children of their own, lest they populate the world with parasites worse than themselves. They need to remember that they too will be old, if they live long enough. By their treatment of their parents and grandparents they teach their children and grandchildren how to treat them. And you can be sure the children are learning! A man took his elderly father to live in what was then called "the poor house." Some preferred to call it an "old folks' home." He took his little son along with them. On the way home the boy said, "I'm glad you showed me where this place is, daddy, 'cause now I know where to take you when you get old." Birthdays of old people are often forgotten by family members who apparently think they don't really need anything, and don't need to be visited because they can't do much anyway and shouldn't be disturbed. Old people should know younger folks are "busy about many things" and don't have much time to spare.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR OLD AGE AND ENJOY IT.

Maintain a good attitude toward yourself, if you want to enjoy your old age. You cannot control the attitudes of others, the unfairness of society, or neglect by the government, the church, or the home. **Learn to control your own attitudes and accept responsibility for them. Accept your age and its limitations and requirements.** Act your age. The attitudes of older persons toward themselves have great influence on the attitudes of others toward them. When old people resent old age and try to hide it or pretend it isn't there they are teaching others not only to despise old age but to despise old people too. When old people accept old age and exemplify its dignity, they are teaching others not only to respect old age but to respect old people as well.

Some things old people should avoid: Avoid inflated feelings of **self-importance**. One who "knows it all" feels compelled to offer an opinion

about every subject, and on every occasion is seldom welcomed by others. Avoid **self-righteousness**. Such a person usually feels he not only has the right but the obligation to straighten out everybody else's affairs. Avoid **self-pity**. Complaining endlessly about aches, pains, and neglect in an effort to get sympathy is self-defeating. It seldom works, but some can't resist trying. Avoid **self-imposed exile** – so sure that one is worthless and unwanted that he actually withdraws, shuts himself off from other people. The result is invariably increased loneliness, bitterness, and frustration.

Make your life a part of something greater than yourself, something that will outlast and outlive you on the earth. Get involved in **humanitarian causes**: liberty, equality, development of human potential; the arts and sciences, technology, etc. Be active in **the cause of Christ**, the gospel, the church, the kingdom of God. There is no greater cause because it is eternal (Colossians 1:24-29). As poet Longfellow put it:

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.*

Be a blessing to others while you can. It is easy to forget the past when an old person becomes a present burden. If the old person has done nothing for others, given nothing of himself to others during the time of his youth and strength, it tends to increase the burden and also increase resentment in those who must endure the burden of his old age. One who has given freely to others while able will generally find a different attitude in those who care for him in old age. The burden is lightened by memories of his past.

Add beauty to your years by making the Lord Jesus Christ the center of your life. **Maintain a spiritual glow, the true beauty of holiness** in a godly old age (Psalm 90:10, 12, and 16-17; Ecclesiastes 12:1-13, Psalm 29:2, 1 Peter 3:4).

Look forward to being released from the dysfunctional body and spending eternity with God in His heaven. Paul's attitude is exemplary (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and 5:1-8). Edward Madison Cameron delivered the following lecture to his body:

When you can go no further, I shall leave you and be free. When we separate I shall continue to exist. A power greater than either of us

started us on our journey together.

Your journey is approaching its end, and you are aware of it. But my journey has merely begun, and I know it, because I have never felt more alive. Our separation is therefore not one of sadness, but of joy. You are weary and want to stop, while I am longing to alight from this slow-moving vehicle and go on without you.

CONCLUSION:

If you want respect and honor in your old age, live an honorable and respectable life (Proverbs 20:29, Proverbs 16:31). If you want the end of life to be the best of life (see Ecclesiastes 7:1), prepare for the time when life will end and you will meet your God (Amos 4:12). For the faithful who die in the Lord, the best is yet to come (Revelation 2:10, 14:13).

A few lines of familiar poetry will provide a good note upon which to end this essay.

*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be:
The last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, A whole I planned.
Youth shows but half.
Trust God. See all, nor be afraid.*

Robert Browning, from his poem
Rabbi ben Ezra.

*Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me.
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the bound-
less deep
Turns again home, turns home.
Sunset and twilight bell,
And after that the dark.
But may there be no sadness of farewell
When I, when I embark.
For though from out this bourne of time and
place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar.*

Alfred Lord Tennyson (written at age 80)



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A Home for Jolee

“A Christian family who has a heart for adoption should not have to carry the financial burden alone.”

– Brittani Aiken

About A Home for Jolee

A Home for Jolee Foundation was founded in 2016 by Robin Burroughs and her daughter Brittani Aiken to help meet the financial needs of Christian families in the process of adoption. Their vision began when Robin and Brittani came alongside friends of theirs who were adopting their first child, baby Jolee. It was then that they began to understand the financial burden that is associated with adopting. Considering the admonition of James 1:27 to care for the fatherless, Robin and Brittani realized that, while we are not all called to adopt, we are all called to help. A Home for Jolee’s mission is to do just that: help make as many adoptions as possible a reality for faithful members of the church of Christ who will then raise these children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Robin served faithfully as the president of the foundation until needing to step down in June 2019 to care for her mother. She passed the torch to Joshua Richardson, who is dedicated to carrying on Robin and Brittani’s vision of providing support, education, and financial assistance to members of the church seeking to bring children into godly homes. Since 2017, AHFJ has awarded over \$39,000 in grants and assisted 9 families with their adoptions.

AHFJ supports families through coaching, adoption workshops, and adoption grants. The **Coaching Team** consists of experienced adoptive parents who are available to talk with prospective adoptive families, families in the process of adoption, and families struggling with post-adoption issues. Coaches can help families get started in the process of adop-

tion, plan fundraising events, budget their adoption funds, and prepare to bring their child home. Whatever stage of the journey you are on, AHFJ’s compassionate coaches are there to encourage you as you navigate the adoption process.

Adoption Workshops are designed to help couples who are considering adoption, families who have adopted, and congregations who desire to support adoptive families in their local church. Workshops run anywhere from one evening to a whole weekend and are centered around a variety of topics such as:

- How to Change a Life: What You Can Do for The Fatherless
- Adoption, Foster Care, and The Church: Being the Spiritual Family Adoptive Parents Need
- The Heart of God: Parenting Your Adopted Child in God’s Image

If your congregation might be interested in scheduling an adoption workshop, please contact Joshua Richardson at ahomeforjolee@gmail.com

The Caelyn Raine Memorial Grant was established in memory of Caelyn Raine Olds, a sweet sixteen-year-old who had a heart for service. She loved God, and she loved children. Her passion lives on through this grant which supports Christian families in the process of adoption. A Home for Jolee is honored to offer the Caelyn Raine Memorial Grant in amounts up to \$5,000. This grant is open to members of the church of Christ who have a completed home study. The grant application can be downloaded at www.ahomeforjolee.org/grants.

Once the application is submitted, families can expect an interview with the board of directors who will then make a prayerful decision about awarding a grant. Once a family is approved for the Caelyn Raine Memorial Grant, AHFJ begins fundraising on their behalf. Through a variety of events, the board and other volunteers work hard to raise funds to meet the family's grant amount. When the total grant amount has been raised, the funds are sent directly to the family's adoption agency.

The Gracie Gaines Grant was established in honor of spunky little Gracie, whom the Gaines family adopted from China in 2019. The Gaines family was matched quickly and needed immediate funds to travel to pick up Gracie. After helping raise funds to meet this urgent need, the board of AHFJ recognized the value of establishing a fund in reserve for families who have emergency needs. This fund is open to both foster and adoptive families to help meet urgent situations that arise such as travel costs, legal fees, or other unexpected and immediate costs associated with their process. To apply, please send a message to ahomeforjolee@gmail.com.

Upcoming Fundraiser

A Home for Jolee could not exist without the hundreds of generous donors who support the foundation's mission. AHFJ's next fundraising event is

the 4th Annual A Run for Jolee Virtual 5K, which takes place on Saturday May 1, 2021. You can participate in this event no matter where you are in the world! As a virtual event, Participants gather in teams or as individuals and run, walk, hike, or bike to raise funds for the next grant recipients. "Participant" registration is \$15 for kids (includes a t-shirt and a builder's gift) and \$25 for adults (includes t-shirt). If you prefer to simply donate, you can be a "Builder" and donate any amount of your choice! Business sponsors who donate \$100 will be featured on the back of the t-shirt and on AHFJ's Facebook page. Business sponsors will also receive a t-shirt this year! You can learn more and register for the 5k at www.ahomeforjolee.org/fundraisers. Participants are encouraged to share pictures or videos of their run, walk, bike, or hike on AHFJ's Facebook page on May 1!

Volunteers Wanted!

AHFJ is a 100% volunteer organization. We run on the passion of our volunteers! The foundation is always looking for people willing to help organize fundraisers, design graphics, set up a booth at lectureships, or donate any other talent in service to adoptive families. If you are interested in volunteering with A Home for Jolee, please send a message to ahomeforjolee@gmail.com.

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Warming by the Fire

JIM MITCHELL

We are all familiar with the story of Peter warming himself by the fire while the high priest, chief priests, elders and scribes try to find a severe enough accusation against Jesus that His doom would be insured. In addition to his three denials of Jesus, what other details surround Peter “warming by the fire” and what applicable lessons can be learned from such a well-known event? Take a brief journey with me into the events of that fateful night and notice many details beyond those three denials of Jesus.

To set these events in motion, as Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus stated *“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...”* (v. 27). Peter responded by saying *“Even if all are made to stumble, Yet I will not be”* (vs. 29). It was at this point that Mark records Jesus telling Peter *“Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times”* (v. 30), which prompts Peter to say *“If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”* And they all said likewise (v. 31). Peter’s words and actions are a study in contrasts – contrasts which still can and do exist among Christians today. We begin our observations with what takes place soon after they enter the Garden (vs. 32-42).

Once they enter Gethsemane, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him further into the garden than the rest and *“began to be troubled and deeply distressed.”* He tells them, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch”* (v.

34). When He comes back from praying, He found them sleeping and asked Peter, *“...are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?”* (v. 37). The irony in this action (or the lack thereof) gives us the first set of contrasts in this moment in the life of Peter.

[1] You stated that you would DIE with Jesus before you would ever Deny Him, but you can’t even stay awake when He asks you to do so!

It is an action totally opposite of what would be expected from one who stated he would give his life for the Savior, but, as can easily be the case, self-perceptions are not always accurate.

Second, when the mob arrives to take Jesus into custody, it is Peter who lashes out in violence and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest (47) (cf. John 18:10). The second contrast:

[2] You lash out in violence (which Jesus never asked you to do), but couldn’t “watch” with Him in His hour of Distress which He DID ask you to do.

The rest of these contrasts seem to take place ever more quickly as the evening unfolds.

“And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest...” (53, 54a). For us, the question to be asked is:

[3] Do you Walk Alongside the Savior, or Follow from Afar?

The danger of the moment (even though Jesus was the target of the hatred of the crowd) changes

Peter's focus from self-perception to self-preservation. It is not, at this point, an outright denial of either Jesus or of Peter's association with Jesus – but he is not going to allow himself to get too close to the Savior.

“And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire” (54b). Matthew adds an additional statement to this action – *“And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end”* (26:58). No longer is it merely perception or preservation. Now it is a type of passivism which challenges the validity of faith itself. You want to see what will happen and how things will turn out in the end, but you want to remain anonymous as you view the events of the night. After Peter sits down to warm himself,

“...the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree” (55, 56).

[4] Do you SIT with the SERVANTS or STAND with the SAVIOR? Are you content with Being Warm by the fire or will you Be a Witness in defense of Jesus? Do you Sit in Silence or Speak Out for the Master?

As the false testimonies continue (57-64) you begin to wonder why Peter, the one who boasted he would DIE with Jesus, does not speak out as the atrocities against Jesus escalate!

“Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, ‘Prophesy!’ And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands” (63-65).

[5] How can you remain Inactive when some type of Involvement is required from one who has boasted of their loyalty? (As a Christian, are you INACTIVE or INVOLVED?)

The portion of the narrative which is the typical focus when we think of this event is that of the denials of Peter (66-71). The denials feign ignorance and culminate in Peter stating, under oath, that he did not know the one for whom he earlier claimed he would die. The contrasts associated with such actions/words would include:

[6] Denying Christ (vs) being Devoted to

Christ and

[7] Cursing Christ (vs) Confessing Christ.

However, if we focus mainly on these two points, we miss much of the impact which the entirety of Peter's actions/words can have on our life. At every point of his failure there was an opportunity to be faithful to his word of loyalty to the Son of God, but his bold statement of 14:31 has been long forgotten until the sound of the rooster brings him back to the reality of the moment.

“A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times’ ” (72).

Luke gives us a detail at this point which the other accounts do not include.

“And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61, 62).

Picture Peter hearing the rooster crowing and instinctively looking in the direction of Jesus as he remembers what the Savior had said to him only to see Jesus looking back at him. As their eyes meet, imagine the shattered feeling which must have taken place within his heart as he realized both the futility of his previous boast and his ultimate failure to stand by the one he knew to be “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16).

What do you do from this point forward? How to you deal with the reality of your weaknesses and failures when you were certain you were much stronger than you have proven to be? Perhaps instead of arguing with the Savior, as did Peter (Mk. 14:27-31), we need to be willing to learn from God's word how to overcome such pressures, obstacles, and temptations as were faced by Peter on this occasion. Perhaps Peter should have asked how he could strengthen his faith so that he would not stumble instead of proclaiming his faith to be greater than the rest and beyond the possibility of stumbling and/or forsaking the Lord. As we face difficulties in life and temptations which would move us away from the Savior, may we endeavor to always Stand with the Savior rather than Sit with the Servants, Warming ourselves by the Fire.

RESTORATION MOVEMENT HISTORY:

Run for Dreams — Trouble for the Church

Jimmie Beller

NOTE: Jimmie Beller passed away in 2015 after a decade-long battle with cancer. He had done extensive work on a history of the church of Christ in Oklahoma, and compiled it into a 300-page book called *Oklahoma Dream Makers*, which he planned to have us publish when he made final tweaks. Unfortunately, he passed away before finishing. This article is two of the chapters in his book.

THE RUN FOR DREAMS

By proclamation, the unassigned lands [of the Indian Territory/Oklahoma] were opened to settlement by President Benjamin Harrison on March 23, 1889. This was only the beginning, and by 1906 twelve other land openings had allowed the settlement of half of the Oklahoma Territory of 1890. However, the other portion remained under the government of the Five Civilized Tribes. This was the beginning of hopes and fears for many of the settlers.

Some 50,000 Kansas people moved across the border to claim land for their homes. Some were faithful Christians with their dreams. Many of the churches of Christ in Kansas were weakened because of the losses in their membership.

Because of a few dedicated preachers and dedicated members it was possible to make the church the leading religious force in Oklahoma. James Murch writes:

The thrilling story of the Disciple invasion of Oklahoma has become an epic. The first opening was in 1889, with the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Territories added in 1892, and the “Strip” in 1893. J. M. Monroe was the hero of the sto-

ry. He organized the first Christian church at Guthrie, then the capital, in 1889, less than two weeks after the official opening. The following Sunday he established the church in Oklahoma City. Before official statehood was reached, the Disciples boasted a congregation in every county and in every town of more than one thousand population. On September 16, 1893, the famous “Run” into the Cherokee Strip occurred. It is said that one hundred fifty thousand people awaited the sound of the gun that would start them across the border to stake claims for new homes. Monroe held a revival among the waiting throngs and baptized about four hundred converts. ... E.F. Boggess, minister at Guthrie, was given a Kentucky thoroughbred racing horse to make the run. Within thirty-nine minutes after the gun sounded, buglers had staked a claim for a church lot in Perry, the capital of the Strip. Other properties were immediately acquired in all strategic locations. For many years the disciples were the leading religious force in Oklahoma.¹

Many great men and their families were willing

¹ James Murch, *CHRISTIAN ONLY*, pp. 193-194.

to overcome their fears, hard times, out-laws and Indians to preach the gospel. They came from all over, some educated and some not. They loved God and his word and they wanted others to know it too. The stories of some of these preachers will show their love for the truth. Because of their lives, thousands will enjoy eternity in heaven. Thank God for the pioneer preachers and members that paved the way for us. We should know what they gave. We must take up where they left off so the next generation will be able to stand.

J. D. Tant wrote about his trip to Oklahoma and about the fear of the settlement in June 9, 1898, to the *Gospel Advocate*. He said,

From Bloomington I went to Cheyenne, to preach the gospel to the people there. We once had a congregation at Cheyenne, but long since had they ceased to keep house for the Lord. Cheyenne presents many interesting thoughts to me. It is on the battleground where General George A Custer in December 1876, surprised a band of Indians, and had the famous battle in which fifteen hundred horses and three hundred Indians, and a few soldiers were killed. As I walked over the battlefield and secured an old canteen for the J. Robert Norvell Museum, I thought: How different my mission from that of General Custer! It has been only three years since the last Indian outbreak at Cheyenne, in which eighty-four warriors swept down on the town to take "Red Tom" (a Texas Ranger) out of jail to murder him, because he had killed an Indian brave the day before. Many still fear the Indians around Cheyenne; many are living without fear of them; and some are hoping that the United States soldiers will be drawn off to Spain, which will leave the Indians without fear, thus causing them to make an outbreak, and this, in turn, will give the citizens an opportunity and an excuse to annihilate the whole race. Almost all Indian fighters claim that is the only way the Indians will ever be civilized.

TROUBLING TIMES FOR THE CHURCH

The growth of the churches in Oklahoma was not always smooth. A breakdown for the churches of Christ in Oklahoma shows it was sometimes slow:²

² The figures are taken from two sources. The left column is taken from annual reports of the governors of Oklahoma Territory to the Secretary of the Interior and the right column

1895

66	Organizations	--
4,000	Members	--
11	Buildings	--
24	Preachers	--

1897

80	Organizations	84
6,000	Members	--
15	Buildings	--
35	Preachers	66

1900

99	Organizations	110
7,500	Members	10,000
50	Buildings	--
100	Preachers	103

1903

270	Organizations	304
16,000	Members	16,000
87	Buildings	103
143	Preachers	152

1905

376	Organizations	376
23,117	Members	22,000

Beginning in 1906, the numbers for churches of Christ and from the Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ (supporters of the missionary societies and instrumental music) were separated.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST³

Year	Congregations	Members
1906	166	8,074
1916	481	21,700
1926	559	34,645
1936	301	25,996

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES⁴

Year	Congregations	Members
1912	403	25,000
1922	360	49,798
1932	337	76,942
1942	329	80,120

is taken from reports presented to the annual convention in the year indicated.

³ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Religious Bodies. 1936 (United States Printing Office, 1936). Bulletin #46,4.

⁴ THE DISCIPLE of CHRIST, p. 469

The churches of Christ, as part of the Restoration Movement, came to Oklahoma. Restoration messages soon caused considerable excitement in the congregations and in the community. Many listened to the restoration plea and renounced the denominational creeds and were baptized, becoming Christians only. New congregations spread everywhere. Restoration churches soon began organizing in other communities.

The work among the denominations was full of battles. The denominations would often join forces to try to keep the Churches of Christ out of their areas. The denominations would combine forces in union revivals when members of the Churches of Christ were planning revivals in their areas. Many of the revivals were not preached by a "full time preacher," but by Christians that were farmers, teachers, or other vocations of work. They had the love of the Gospel and saw the need to live and preach the whole truth. These individual members started many of the congregations. They were convinced that God had commanded them to go into this new land and preach the gospel to every creature and they did. Because of their faith and work the churches were the fastest growing religious body in Oklahoma during this time (around 1900).

Some of these members would attend this union meeting of the denominations and would question what was taught. They were often called upon to defend the truth against denomination's preachers and sometime their own brothers in Christ. They were faithful soldiers that recognized their obligation to uphold the truth before all. They had the right attitude, the truth, and they had the love for the souls of the people. At that time, the members were people of the Book. Denomination's members believed in the Bible and its authority, so when the members showed what the Bible taught, they had to change to be right with God. Because of the knowledge of the Bible that each member had, the Church grew as a prairie fire across this new land.

The first struggle we want to look at is the rupture that took place in the Restoration Movement. In 1906, the growing division between the churches of

Christ and the Christian Church was made official in the United States Census of Religious Bodies. Before 1906, they were considered as one body. The fundamental divisions were the attitudes toward the scriptures. There was a period of controversy before this time. From the Civil War until 1906 there were many debates on slavery, Christians going to war, located preachers, colleges, Sunday schools, individual cups, open or close communion, titles, one man rule, pastorate, Premillennialism, instrumental music in worship, and missionary societies. Many of these same issues also came up after the division of 1906 in the Church of Christ. The main two issues that caused the division were Missionary Society and instrumental music in worship. It trends toward denominatism, and going beyond the silence of the scriptures.

Typically, across Oklahoma and the nation, it was the acapella brethren who were forced out. As a result, many of the founding dates recorded during this period reflect the date the non-instrumentalists left their association with Christian/Disciples congregations and formed independent congregations. Each congregation was autonomous, free to decide upon its own designation.

By 1884, Brother James A. Harding said, "It is an undeniable fact that there are two wings to this reformation; and that they are drifting

part."⁵ J. D. Tant said,

"I am glad to note that circumstances are forcing the lines to be drawn in Tennessee between the Churches of Christ and the digressive as is the case in Texas".⁶

The positions of the digressive appeared to James A. Harding to be:

"...a deliberate and systematic effort to induce disciples of Christ to give up all effort and hope of securing the unity for which Christ prayed. It is a bungling, brazen effort, to betray the religion of Jesus into the hands of its enemies; and is as bad no doubt in God's sight as



James B. Nelson
TheRestorationMovement.com

⁵ GOSPEL ADVOCATE, Feb. 27, 1908, p. 133

⁶ GOSPEL ADVOCATE, Aug. 20, 1903, p. 539

the betrayal of Judas".⁷

It was a time of turmoil and division. Many congregations were digressing. Much effort was required to save some congregations that did not want to take sides. Instruments were moved in for worship against those that were opposed its uses. The brethren were locked out of their house by the "digressives" and had no place to meet. Those outside (non-Christians) saw how they treated each other over the introduction of in instrumental music into the worship. Many of the digressives would come in and capture almost all the membership of a congregation. Like the Civil War, a few years before, brother against brother, families against families, and neighbors against neighbors. Those that stood against the introduction of instruments in worship had to stand against their Brethren in Christ, members of their own families, and their neighbors. Many of the members would go with the building and would not get involve with the problems. Like today, when division in a congregation takes place, most members don't want to be involved and will not speak out.

Brother James Bridges Nelson wrote to the *Gospel Advocate* in 1902, about the work in the Oklahoma Territory. He wrote:

My meeting at Maud resulted in one baptism. The meeting began on July 1, and eleven days. This was a destitute place. Brother W. C. Scruggs stood by me in this meeting.

I began a meeting a Francis on the second Lord's day in July, and preached for sixteen days in and around that place. The meeting resulted in eighteen baptisms and two restorations.

I am at present in the interesting meeting with my home congregation, at Granite. I baptized nineteen persons here during last March, and Brother Tuttle baptized one after I left. We are expecting a good meeting. From here I shall go to Retrop for a meeting. Brother W. C. Smith is leading the song service for me. I am using a tent in my work this summer.

Brother J. W. Dunn had a good meeting at Antelop, resulting in one baptism. He is now in a meeting at Willow.

Brother W. T. Kidwell, of Fort Worth, Texas, has just closed a good meeting near Ural with three baptisms.

Brother A. J. McCarty's meeting at Warren resulted in two baptisms.

Brother N. O. Ray is at present in a meeting at Elk City, with a good attendance.

Brother D. F. Michael is in a meeting at Peaster.

Brother Smith, of Lockney, Texas is in a meeting at Navajoe.

The digressives have begun their destructive work in Mangum. Mr. Tabor, a noted perverter of the gospel, has been in a meeting for the past four weeks. They have succeeded in organizing a congregation of about forty members. With the exception of two or three, those whom they got were doing nothing for the cause. One A. W. Putman, who is a full-fledged digressive—and who, when with a

loyal preacher, has tried to leave the impression on him that he (Putman) is loyal has done much to start up the digressive work in Mangum. I want to warn the loyal brethren in Oklahoma Territory against him; and, besides, there is others

with him in the work—J.N. Gidson and Travis Johnson. The brethren comprising the loyal congregation in Mangum have three faithful, God-fearing elders—Brethren D. S. Holt, L. A. Sweet, and Hart. These men have warned the congregation against the modern inventions and have succeeded in keeping the flock together. Brethren, continue true to God and he will bless and save you. We hope to have in Mangum a discussion on "Instrumental Music in the Worship" between Brother H. E. Warlick and J. N. Gidson, a digressive.

Brother J. H. Lawson and Elder D. Ray, a Baptist, are expecting to engage in a debate at Granite some time soon.

I am glad to have a debate with Elder W. C. Benson, also a Baptist, at Francis, beginning on September 8 and continuing six days. The church question will be discussed.

⁷ CHRISTIAN LEADER and the WAY, XVIII, Sept. 1904,

I am glad to notice the grand work, which Brother John R. Williams is doing in West Tennessee. Keep up the good work, Brother Williams!

I am rejoiced to see so many good articles on "Mission Work" in the Gospel Advocate of late. These articles are doing good and more should be written.

Brother Elam has written some good articles of late. I like his writing very much indeed. I heard him preach at Antioch Church, near Readyville, Tenn. About fifteen years ago.

Those that were faithful to the truth had to leave to continue to be faithful, but what about those that stayed? Most did not believe the false teaching, but would not speak out against it. Some Elders would go by the votes of its members, and many would decline to vote. Truth and error never harmonized; therefore, division occurred. When Elderships stood against the digressive movement in the congregations, they were threatened with a lawsuit. Some faithful brothers would give up without a fight to keep it out of the courts. They believed it was best to quietly allow them to have the building without a suit. They were opposed to lawsuits with brethren over the property coming before the courts of the land. Some saw the problems coming and did something about it. Some of the Elders and leaders would put a "Restrictive clause" in the deed of the property. John M. Harrell, a pioneer preacher, sold a lot to the College Street Church on January 5, 1905. The following restrictive clauses were in the deed.

To have and to hold for the use of the said Church of Christ and upon the express conditions that no organ or other musical instrument be used or kept and that no fair, festival, or other practices unauthorized in the New Testament be held or conducted in upon or about said premises or in any of the buildings constructed thereon; and in case any such conduct, act, or unauthorized practices are committed or performed in upon or about such premises or

any organ or musical instrument be introduced into any house or edifice erected on said premises then the management and control of said house and premises shall be vested in the persons of said Church of Christ who may be opposed to the organ or other musical instruments, festivals or other things herein before named being used in said house, said edifice, or house erected on said lot".⁸

Many restrictive clauses were added to the deeds of the property to keep the digressive brothers from moving in, and taking over. Many of the faithful brethren lost their buildings over the instrument and missionary society. In those days, a gospel preacher had to be prepared to give an answer for what he preached (2 Pet. 3:15). They were often forced to defend their cause in public debates. Gospel preachers and strong members stood for the truth from the Bible. Many congregations were saved from the digressive movement. Because of such preachers, Elders, and members, the Church was able to stand strong in Oklahoma.

Another period of troubling times for the church was during the depression. The depression and the Dust Bowl took their toll on families, towns, and on the congregations in Oklahoma. In Oklahoma most had no money, but the weather hurt farming and caused health problems. Because of the depression, rapidly increasing numbers of people were unable to support themselves and their families, and many of the towns and congregations faded away

like the tumbleweed. Many Christians had to leave Oklahoma for new hopes and dreams, to other lands where dreams could come true again. They went everywhere preaching the word.



John M. Harrell
TheRestorationMovement.com

⁸ Gospel Preachers of Yesteryear, Loyd L. Smith, pg. 167)



THE MYSTERY

GANTT CARTER

Do you like mysteries? Perhaps a thrilling murder mystery novel, or maybe a whodunit film? They can be quite interesting and entertaining, yes? What about mysteries of the Bible? No, no, not like that, but there is at least one mystery. The apostle Paul writes about a mystery that is worthy of our utmost attention and more...

The mystery Paul writes about is known as “the mystery of Christ.” Does that mean that there is something mysterious about Jesus, the Christ? No. Paul uses a term that merely refers to something hidden or unknown. More specifically, this mystery is not unknowable at all. However, it is a truth/idea that is not knowable apart from Divine revelation. Look at the 3rd chapter of the letter Paul writes to the holy ones in the ancient city of Ephesus.

The Revelation

Paul begins chapter three by reminding us that he is a prisoner of the Messiah on behalf of the non-Jews (Gentiles). He has just shared truths regarding the status of Jews and non-Jews, both prior to the coming of Jesus and now after His coming (see Eph. 2:11-22). As he continues, he assumes they are aware of the gift committed to his charge, “how the mystery was made known to me by revelation” (3:3). Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, initially, on the road to Damascus, and then in later in far greater detail (cf. Gal.1:15-17). Notice then what he explains about his own writings:

“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph. 3:4-5 ESV).

Now we’re getting to the heart of this mystery. Something was revealed to Paul, and now it can be understood by all who choose to read their writings. This concept alone is worthy of thorough reflection. Have you ever had someone tell you that you cannot understand the writings that make up the Bible, or at least not by yourself and for yourself? Please note how simple this is made here: One can understand the mystery of the Messiah by reading the words of an inspired writer like the apostle Paul (see 2 Peter 1:18-21 and 2 Tim. 3:14-4:2).

So...you want to know the mystery of the Messiah? Start reading a copy of the Word of God today!

Are there difficult parts in the Bible? Absolutely! Another apostle, Peter, says some of Paul’s work is difficult to grasp (2 Peter 3:15-16). Of course, Peter does not state that even the difficult portions are *impossible* to figure out, or that one needs something/someone to make them understand. Instead, he gives warnings about some who twist words to their own ruin and he provides encourage to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

What is this Mystery?

What is this specific mystery here in Ephesians 3? Thankfully, we are not simply left to work out the answer on our own, or even left to just wonder on endlessly. He plainly gives us the capsule answer in one statement in the very next verse:

“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

It is worth noting that the phrase, “This mystery is,” is not in the original text, but it is clearly inferred from the context, especially verse four. When

we read this letter, we can understand the mystery; of non-Jews (at least in the ethnic sense) being heirs of the promises of God without distinction or any additional qualifiers. Although in the current time, this truth may not always be viewed with much significance, this idea was huge in their time. Consider again the previous chapter or look in the book of Acts at the way many in ethnic Israel reacted at even the expression of this idea. This situation also factors into why Paul is currently imprisoned (“on behalf of the Gentiles”) as he writes these words.

Regardless of the passing of time and cultural changes, it is still just as true today that there are no second-class citizens when it comes to being in the church of Jesus. We are all one in Him in reality, and we should act that way.

The Goal

The apostle Paul was the human messenger chosen by God to lead the way in announcing this powerful message to the world (Ephesians 3:7-8); “to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (3:9). Anyone can (not that all will) have access to the unsearchable riches of King Jesus! What was hidden for a long time, with many hints along the way, has now been revealed for all to see. Anyone with a heart to listen can learn of the Messiah, know Him and His grace, and become a part of His covenant people.

However, the sentence starting in verse 8 keeps going and brings us to the goal of all we have noticed thus far: “So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10). People from all nations are now in the family of Jesus “through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). The gospel at its core is the Kingship of Jesus by means of His death, burial, and resurrection (Isaiah 52:7; Mark 1:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 15:1-4). In stark contrast with the ways and wisdom of the world, Jesus and His cross are the power and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5).

Therefore, the church, as the body of people created from all nations by the cross, exhibits the wisdom of God. Jesus’ disciples come from many different places, paths of life, and are all vastly different from each other in many ways. So also, the wisdom of God is manifold or many-sided, for it unites them all as one in Jesus. One might compare the wisdom of God to a precious diamond that, with all its facets and angles, glitters and shines in the light

with all the colors of the rainbow.

God brought His plan into the light with the intent of His own glory being shone into the universe in such an awesome way! This is the goal. The beginning of this letter gives us more than one indication of the connection between God’s redemptive work and the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). As well, Jesus was raised and given a seat in the heavenly places, “far above all rule and authority” (Ephesians 1:20-21).

“This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory” (Ephesians 3:11-13).

As those in the church (assembly) of the Messiah, is that how we view ourselves? Do we see the church of God as a lovely display placed on the shelf of the world for all to behold the wisdom, beauty, and power of God? We are representatives of God’s ultimate purpose in history. At the end of the chapter, Paul prays, “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:21). Do you think this could be related to our instruction to do everything, regardless of what it may be (even eating and drinking), to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31)?

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

The End

May we all realize that we are part of the cosmic work of the God of heaven and earth, and then allow that big picture view to change our own individual stories as we weave them into the praise of the glory of His grace. May we also call others to come to know Jesus and to share in the inheritance of His people. In the end, this mystery is not one to be solved, but one that is to be embraced and lived out in our daily thoughts, words, and actions. To God be the glory. Amen.



The Bones of Peter

JOHN KRIVAK

A Catholic friend gifted to me a book, *The Fisherman's Tomb* by John O'Neill (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2018). It proved to be a captivating page-turner. While attempting to bury a deceased pope under St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the digging revealed many ancient burial chambers (some pagan; some Christian). Among them, the physical remains of Peter, the apostle of Jesus! Playing roles in this archaeological drama are a wealthy Texas financier, a troublesome Vatican bureaucrat, a few popes, and a most unlikely archaeologist.

I suspect that while both of us value this amazing discovery, my friend and I have different reasons. For Catholics, finding the bones under the Basilica means a truly literal fulfillment of the famous declaration of Jesus: "*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church*" (Matthew 16:18, NASB)! The initial construction (ca 319) and the reconstruction (begun in 1505) centered the church directly over the "relics" of the man that Catholics regard as the first pope. This is the very anchor of papal succession that is the recognized authority structure.

The quest began in secret during WWII, and the book describes the complicated political strategies adopted by the Vatican toward the Fascists in Rome and toward the Nazis. It seems that a long-forgotten history lay buried under Vatican Hill, although tradition persisted that this was Peter's burial site. There were worries that a failed search would damage everything from personal piety to confidence in Catholicism—hence the secrecy.

Roman persecution against Christians was reversed during the reign of Constantine (306-337 AD) when Christianity was made the state religion. He built the first Basilica on Vatican Hill in Rome, but much earth had to be hauled in to make a level foundation atop the hill. This covered a forgotten network of generational tombs for the leading families of Rome. This Necropolis and its contents were perfectly preserved right under Saint Peter's Basilica. Ancient clues from the Vatican library held that Constantine had placed Peter's bones in a bronze sarcophagus inside a marble enclosure. They would be marked by something called the Trophy of Gaius.

Bones were found. First, the wrong ones. But then, a set with the leg bones severed above the ankles (apparently this gruesome procedure was easier than removing the nails from the feet, including for victims crucified upside down). A team of forensic experts evaluated the remains and everything indicated authenticity. Unfortunately the detailed results that generated this evaluation are not in the book. That may have removed doubts that the bones are really Peter's; as it is, I think authenticity is likely. By the way, the actual tomb of Paul has also been located in Rome. Both apostles are thought to have been executed by Nero—Paul by beheading and Peter by upside-down crucifixion.

For me (formerly a Catholic), finding the actual bones of Peter is important, even though I do not regard his authority as singular among humans. Such artifacts anchor the Bible in history, in reality. They reinforce the veracity of Scripture and back-up

Peter's claim: *"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty"* (2 Peter 1:16). Christian faith does not float among myths and fables. We have the bones of an eyewitness to Jesus.

I do not believe the Catholic doctrine that—first with Peter—places spiritual authority in popes, who are merely human. It is not my intent to exegete Matthew 16:18 or review the history of the papacy to validate my disbelief. That ground has been well covered by commentators (and see Gary Henson, *The Ivory Domino* (Charleston, AR: Cobb Publishing, 2018). Instead, let's approach with a few theological broad strokes.

Where to begin? Catholicism is a whole different world, in which I feel most uncomfortable. It would do nothing for me to worship in a church (here, a church building) built over the bones of Peter! I do not regard any building as sacred space And Peter—as a person—has no place in my worship, beyond his apostolic function to carve out an exalted place in the faith of the church for Lord Jesus—who alone gets our worship. And it won't help here to finely shave meanings between "worship" and "veneration"—I cannot give Peter what I can only give to Jesus. It strikes me as not a little creepy and as downright pagan to see how "relics" are regarded by superstitious people as a source for healing and blessing. If rotting bones even were verified to generate such miracles, I would suspect that Satan produced the spectacle to distract glory from Jesus.



Further, Peter never rises to a position of singular authority—neither among the Twelve nor over the entire church. It would require more than Matthew 16:18—which can be made to "sound like" that—to give this claim credibility. It flies against two competing themes. The first is the absolute claim to such authority for Jesus (in Matthew, this culminates in the *"all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"* of 28:18). There is

no indication, here or elsewhere, that Jesus gives Peter a share—and a major share at that! I honor the authority given by the Holy Spirit to Peter through God-breathed inspiration as author of I & II Peter. Instead of using these Scriptures as a platform to establish papal authority for himself and for a chain of successors, Peter exalts Jesus. Peter functions as an apostle—not as a pope.

Second, it is folly to build "papal infallibility" on the fallibility of Peter. I love Peter because—like all



of us—he is far from perfect. Given Peter, we all have hope. Peter (the "rock") once began to sink like a stone while demonstrating his faith (Matt. 14:28ff). He denied Jesus—not once, not twice—three times. When Jesus addresses this failure in John 21 by asking three times if Peter loves Him, the scene ends with Peter's spiritual status very much unsettled. Jesus proved His love as Good Shepherd by laying down His life for the sheep. Will Peter feed His sheep, tend His lambs? Jesus ends (John 21:18-19) by foretelling the sort of death that Peter will die. Both Jesus and Peter (if tradition is true) die

by crucifixion. That qualifies Jesus to be Lord; it does not qualify Peter to be pope.

WE PREACH THE MIRACULOUS BIRTH

Mark McWhorter

In 2 B.C., Caesar Augustus celebrated his 25th year as Emperor. Rome was celebrating its 750th year of existence. Festivities were held in Rome, its provinces and client kingdoms. There were magnificent displays and carnivals throughout the empire. A new forum was dedicated bearing Augustus' name.

Augustus was seen, as a type of **“Prince of Peace.”** He was given the title **“Pater Patriae” (Father of the Country)** on February 5, 2 B.C. This was the traditional day that honored peace and reconciliation among all classes of people in the Roman Empire. Throughout this year he was recognized as the one who brought peace and tranquility to the world. He was titled the Guardian and Keeper of the Empire.

(Think about Jesus being the Prince of Peace. In Isaiah 9:6, he is called everlasting Father [meaning he is the one who gives spiritual birth to those in the Kingdom]. In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is the Author. [This word was used in several ways in the secular realm. One was to describe the person who founded or blazed the trail of a nation. Thus, in a fashion, the Father of a country.])

The Roman poet, **Virgil**, who lived in the First Century B.C., forecast that a child destined to bring in a Golden Age of peace and prosperity would be born at this time.

Seutonius, in the 2nd Century A.D., stated that Romans at this time had long believed that it was destined for the empire of the world to be given to someone coming from Judea.

Tacitus, who also lived in the 2nd Century A.D., records that, the majority of Jewish people believed that at this time the east would renew its strength and from Judea a ruler would come.

(Interestingly, later around 60 A.D., Nero was advised by some of his court astrologers that it was prudent for him to move his seat of empire to Jerusalem because that city was destined to become the capital of the world. They were a few years late in realizing the Kingdom of God/Christ had already begun in Jerusalem.)

At this time active war had nearly ceased and

large numbers of legionary soldiers had been reduced from military service over the last five years.

The pirates of the seas had been almost abolished, making sea travel extremely safe.

The Greek language was spoken by a large portion of the known world. The Greek translation of the Old Law, the Septuagint, was widely read and circulated in the Gentile world.

Roman philosophers were looking for a new direction to stem the tide of society's self-destruction. Family life in the Empire had sunk to an all-time low. There was wide-spread moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, many throughout the Roman Empire were looking for something to fill the void in their lives.

Well-designed road systems made traveling easier than it had ever been. Several nations had large sailing fleets making long-distance travel easier than it had ever been. There is evidence that ships from numerous nations were making contact throughout the entire world. (This is not politically correct with those who insist on the evolution of man's technology and abilities, stating that such capabilities were beyond those in the First Century). This would aid in the kingdom being preached throughout the world (Colossians 1:23).

The Jews were scattered throughout the world, thus giving a familiarity of monotheism of the One True God, Jehovah the Creator, to much of the world. They set up synagogues in many cities to which they moved.

There were interesting and rare astrological events which occurred over the previous 4 years and during 2 B.C.

“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Galatians 4:4-5.

As we proceed through this lesson, keep in mind the phrase, “the fullness of time.” The word fullness is *“pleroma”* in the Greek. It means “that which fills

up, that which makes something full or complete.”

God, who knows all things, had a plan. His plan was to bring forth a redeemer, His Son. The timing for that Redeemer was all-important. His coming was to be at the perfect time in man’s history. Daniel had given a prophecy that the Messiah would come during the Roman Empire (Daniel 2). Jesus would claim in Mark 1:15, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”

- Was Jesus right or was he lying? Was he the greatest con man in history?
- Was he really the “only begotten Son?” (John 1:18)
- Did God really “become flesh” and tabernacle among us? (John 1:14)
- Was God made in the likeness of man and found in fashion as a man? (Philippians 2:5-8)
- Was God, who was in the beginning (John 1:1), manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16)?

John the Baptizer

It was a great honor to burn incense in the Temple. Because there were so many priests in the tribe of Levi, one’s turn to burn the incense might only come once in a lifetime. Lots were cast to see who would get their chance. Zacharias was getting his opportunity. What a thrill to enter the Temple to burn the sacred incense on the holy altar. As he is going about this duty, an angel, Gabriel, appears to him on the right side of the altar and informs him that his wife of many years is going to have a son. Elisabeth had been unable to bear children. It is interesting that the angel tells Zacharias that his prayer has been heard. Since he and his wife are very elderly, we must assume that his prayers had been going up to God for many years. And, in fact, that request of God had stopped at some point due to Elisabeth’s age.

Gabriel says their son, John, will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is going to bring many Israelites back to a proper faith. But most importantly, we are told in Luke 1:17 that John will prepare the people for the Lord. Surely Zacharias thought of Malachi 3:1:

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

And, Isaiah 40:3:

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

And Malachi 4:5:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

In Luke 1:6, we are told that Zacharias and Elisabeth were righteous before God. They walked in all His commandments and ordinances blameless. (Zacharias was allowed by the Law to retire from Temple service at the age of 50. However, a priest could voluntarily continue to serve. Those who did so, were given the highest honor and respect among the Jews.) God chose godly parents to rear the Lord’s forerunner. This child would also be a miraculous child, born of a barren elderly mother.

Zacharias finds this hard to believe and, thus, is struck dumb (and possibly deaf) until the child is born and circumcised. Zacharias’ speech is miraculously restored after he writes on a tablet to tell everyone that the child will be called John. He now prophesies that his child will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways (Luke 1:76) and that he will be called “the prophet of the Highest.”

Mary

Six months after Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, he appears to a young virgin in the town of Nazareth. Mary is told that she is going to have a son as well. Her child will be the result of the Holy Spirit coming down upon her. Her child will be called “the Son of the Highest.” (Luke 1:32) He will be called “the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35). His name shall be JESUS. (Luke 1:31)

In Genesis 3:15, Satan is told that enmity will be put between Satan’s seed and the woman’s seed. God did not say it would be the man’s seed. This is the first prophecy regarding Christ. Unlike all other babies born, Christ’s conception was not the result of a physical man’s seed. He was the result of the Holy Spirit (God) and Mary’s seed.

Mary is told that her cousin, Elisabeth, is also pregnant by the power of God. With this new revelation, Mary rushes to visit Elisabeth. As Mary approaches, Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and tells Mary that she (Mary) is blessed among all women. She also acknowledges that Mary is preg-

nant with the Lord. She says her son jumped for joy in her womb as Mary approached. [It was told by Gabriel that John would have the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb in verse fifteen (15).]

Mary replies with joy toward God. Her reply recorded in Luke 1:46-55 is thought to have been sung. She says that God is remembering the mercy of which he spoke about with Abraham. This is in reference to the covenant God made with him in Genesis 15.

(The mercy of God intended here is the coming of the One seed. She is talking about her baby. Paul referenced this One seed in Galatians 3:16. In that verse, Paul points to the promise to Abram in Genesis 17. In Genesis 12, God promises Abram that his seed will be as numerous as the stars. Therefore, Genesis 12 is not the promise of One seed as is the promise to him in Genesis 17. In Genesis 15, Abram tells God he has not had a son that was promised, so he was going to make Eliezer, his servant, the son. God says that Eliezer is not the son he has been promised. Abram is told to go out and look at the stars. He tells Abram to tell the stars and number them. This would make no sense if Abram is to be convinced about one seed if God is telling him to count many stars. The words used in Hebrew can mean to take an accounting of, or to get the meaning. It is this writer's belief that the Constellation names were given to man by God. [It is stated in Amos 5:8 that God made Orion. This indicates he did not just create the stars but placed the names upon them. Psalm 147:4 tells us God has names for all the stars. This would involve not only single names but group names.] That is the only rational conclusion why nations throughout history would have many of the same constellations. Most constellations look nothing like what they are portraying. Many seem to be unconnected stars, yet they portray something specific. And, in those constellations are symbols of the scheme of redemption coming via a spiritual conqueror. God even stated, in Genesis 1:14, the stars were for signs. Abram would not have to understand all aspects of that message to understand from it that

It is interesting to note that in Matthew 1:16 we are told that Jacob begat Joseph "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and thus could not "begat" him as all previous ancestors had done in the lineage.

God had even given the promise of One to come who would be the spiritual salvation of mankind in the stars. And for that One to come from his lineage, he would have to have a biological son.)

Mary stays for three months and then returns home about the time John is born.

Joseph

Mary is engaged to Joseph, a man of the house of David, the tribe of Judah. When Joseph is informed of Mary's pregnancy, he is unsure what to do. He is contemplating canceling their wedding when an angel appears to him in a dream and confirms for him that the child is conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20). He is told that the child's name shall be Jesus. We are told in Matthew 1:22-23, that all this was done so that Isaiah 7:14 would be fulfilled, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel."

With this information, Joseph marries Mary. This means that Joseph is now the legal father of Jesus. In Luke 3:23 when Jesus begins his ministry, we are told that it "was supposed" that he was Joseph's son. The word 'supposed' means 'to think or believe something is proper by law.' Neighbors have had no idea that Jesus is the Son of God. In chapter one of Matthew the lineage of Christ is given. It is interesting to note that in verse 16 we are told that Jacob begat Joseph "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and thus could not "begat" him as all previous ancestors had done in the lineage.

Joseph is a descendant of David (Matthew 1; Luke 2:4). Thus, Jesus' birth begins the fulfillment of Jeremiah 23:5: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth." This Branch is raised 'unto' David, not out of David. This is another possible indication that Jesus is not a biological descendant but a legal one.

Approximately thirty years after his birth, Jesus

in Matthew 22:42-46 asks the Pharisees how David could prophecy that Jesus would be David's Lord and David's son at the same time. They could not answer the question without affirming the virgin birth and the fact that Jesus is God.

In Romans 1:3, we read, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; which was **made** of the seed of David according to the flesh." The word for "made" is "became." The word for biological inheritance, born, is not used. The same word is used in John 1:14 when it reads, "the Word was made flesh" and Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." This coincides with Jeremiah 31:22, "For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man." The pregnancy and birth of Jesus is not just another natural pregnancy and birth. God became flesh.

This legal sonship to Joseph also fulfills Isaiah 11:1-2, "And there shall come forth a rod (a shoot) out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, and the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." Luke 3:32 documents that Jesus is indeed from the lineage of Jesse.

The Birth and the Shepherds

Approximately six months later Joseph takes Mary with him to Bethlehem to take care of a required poll tax by Caesar Augustus. While there, Mary gives birth to Jesus.

His birth in Bethlehem fulfills the prophecy given 700 years earlier in Micah 5:2, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting." Only God has been from everlasting. This fulfillment is just another indication that his birth is indeed miraculous, and that Jesus is God.

An angel appears to shepherds in a field near Bethlehem (Luke 2:9). These shepherds are likely those in charge of the Passover lambs used in the Temple. This area about five miles southwest of Jerusalem was where these lambs were kept. The fields had a watchtower called Migdal Eder, the Tower of the Flock. In the First Century, this tower was considered within the city limits of Bethlehem. There were special mangers in this area for placing

newborn lambs that were considered acceptable for future sacrifice, particularly those for the Passover and Atonement Day. Only those lambs without spot or blemish were kept here after birth. How appropriate that those in charge of the Passover lambs will be some of the first to see the Lamb of God.

(Micah 4:8 prophesied of the birth being in this Tower, "O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." The Migdal Eder not only was used for the shepherds to oversee flocks in the fields, but also as a military outlook. As such, it was considered a stronghold. Any invading force approaching Jerusalem from the south could be seen from the tower. This usage also has a tie with Jesus' role as Prince of the Lord's Army. God is several times referenced as a strong tower; Psalm 61:3; Proverbs 18:10; Nahum 1:7. It is also of interest that the One who would be the ultimate High Priest, who was the only one who could sacrifice the Passover Lamb, was placed in the manger of the Passover Lamb. Jesus would sacrifice himself by being led to the Cross. (There are some commentators who place the birth in the lower room of a normal house. This is where the animals were kept and where families usually slept. The upper rooms were used as guest rooms. It is thought that customary hospitality would not have allowed Mary and Joseph to be turned away from staying in a home. This author believes Micah 4:8 gives too much of a prophecy and connection with Jesus' future roles for the hospitality custom to over-rule it.)

The angel informs them that Christ the Lord, the Savior, has been born in the city of David. They will know the child because he is wrapped in swaddling clothes and is lying in a manger. The shepherds are witness to a multitude of angels praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (It was custom at this time for newborn babies to be washed with salt and wrapped in strips of cloth. However, if the normal custom was being referenced, it would not give any specificity for the baby they were looking for. But this is another reference to the Migdal Eder. Old, worn-out linen priest garments were torn into strips and kept in the Migdal Eder for wrapping the lambs that were placed in the mangers. Jesus was wrapped in these strips.)

The shepherds see Jesus and tell everyone they

can about what they were told and what they had seen. People wondered but evidently did not take it too seriously. Otherwise, Mary and Joseph would have been swamped with curious and excited visitors. It must be remembered that shepherds were considered the lowliest of those in a career. The Jews would not believe that God announced the Messiah's coming through lowly shepherds, even if they were priests. And it had become a common belief at this time that the Messiah was going to suddenly appear in the Court of the Temple (Malachi 3:1). (A probable reason for Satan tempting Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple wall. Instead of jumping to the outside, Satan was saying jump inside. Angels would not allow him to be harmed and the Jews would quickly accept him as the Messiah. Satan was saying there was no reason to die to be the King of the Jews.)

In the Temple

When Mary's 40 days of purification are fulfilled according to the Mosaic Law, detailed in Leviticus 12:2-6, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and present the proper sacrifice. Every male was to be dedicated as holy to the Lord.

In the Temple was a just and devout old man, Simeon. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. On this day, he is brought to the Temple by the Spirit. Simeon sees the baby Jesus (now about 6 weeks old) and takes him up in his arms. He speaks out that God can now let him die because he has seen the salvation and light of not only the Israelites but also the Gentiles. (Luke 2:29-32).

One would think that nothing at this point could surprise Mary and Joseph. But they marvel at what Simeon has said. The Jews, as a whole, had a misconception that the Messiah was coming to set up an earthly kingdom, with the Jews as His ruling people. Simeon was reiterating what Isaiah had stated in Isaiah 9:2:

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"

And in Isaiah 60:1-3:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and

gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

The multitude of angels had stated that there would be peace on earth. Simeon, by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, is showing that this would be peace for all nations through the light of salvation brought by Jesus.

Simeon is not finished. He next blesses them and speaks directly to Mary (Luke 2:34-35). He tells her that her that many will fall but rise because of her son. Simeon uses the word for resurrection. He is prophesying that those who are willing to fall (die) for her son, will gain a resurrection. Jesus later says that he is the resurrection in John 11:25. Another way to interpret the quote is that the 'fall' is representative of those who will not believe and thus have eternal damnation. Those being resurrected represent believers who inherit eternal life.

Her son will be a sign spoken against. In Isaiah 7:14, the babe is pictured as a sign. And a **sword will pierce through her soul**. This prophecy of their son must also have brought questions to their minds. How would a sword pierce Mary's soul?

(Why Mary is addressed with this and not Joseph can only be conjectured. It is possibly because Joseph is dead by the time Jesus is crucified and will not witness the death of his son. We know he is not mentioned during the crucifixion records. Jesus from the cross tells John to take Mary as his mother. This indicates that Joseph is not alive. Jesus as the oldest child would have the responsibility to take care of her. He transfers this to John. This also is an indication that none of Jesus' siblings believe in him nor are they present at his crucifixion. Otherwise, Jesus could have transferred the responsibility to a younger brother.)

Immediately recorded after Simeon's presence is an interchange with a prophetess, named Anna. Anna is 84 years old and a widow. She stayed in the Temple praying and fasting night and day. She also sees the baby Jesus and gives thanks to God for allowing her to see the redemption of Jerusalem (Israel) (Luke 2:38). She went about telling others that were looking for that redemption that she had seen the one who would bring it.

After Mary and Joseph complete their requirements of the Law of Moses, they return to either Bethlehem or Nazareth to resume their normal lives.

They are in Bethlehem when the wise men visit him. (Most commentators believe they returned to Bethlehem. They believe Luke simply does not record certain events.)

The Wise Men

Sometime later, wise men from the east come to Jerusalem. They tell Herod that they have seen the star indicating the birth of the King of the Jews. They desire to worship him and to present him with frankincense, gold, and myrrh. The Septuagint version of Isaiah 60:6 has foreign dignitaries giving such gifts to the Messiah. The three gifts were not uncommon to be given to kings. In regard to Jesus being given them, it is interesting that frankincense was intricately involved in the priesthood; gold was particularly considered a gift for a king; and myrrh was considered for healing and anointing in death.

These wise men are more than likely the Chaldean Magi. These individuals were known as the greatest astronomers of the known world. Egyptian, Roman, Persian, and Greek astronomers among others went to their schools to learn. They rarely made such long trips with only a few of them present. For such important trips, a large group of them would travel together. And they would have had a large company of servants with them. Trains of one hundred camels would not be unusual.

It is apparent that these Magi knew of a prophecy which indicated that the Messiah would be born and that there would be astronomical indicators of such. While we cannot know for sure it is possible and plausible that Daniel gave the prophecy. When he was in Babylon, he became the chief of the astrologers and Chaldeans (Daniel 5:11). The Jews highly admired the Magi, partly because of Daniel's association, and because the Magi did not worship idolatrous images of God. Philo speaks very warmly of them. (It is highly likely that Zoroastrianism is directly linked with these ancient Magi.)

There were some very interesting astrological events that occurred during the years 3 to 1 B.C. The planets, stars, and constellations had patterns, which rarely occur. Time will not permit us to go into all of these, but notice just a little of what **Roman** history recorded.

In June of 2 B.C. Jupiter and Venus came so close that they appeared as one giant star. They appeared in the Constellation Leo, "the Lion," the Royal Constellation. This Constellation was dominated by the Star Regulus, the King Star. The Romans saw this as demonstrating Roman rule and domination. Jupiter was considered the guardian and ruler of the Empire. Venus was believed to be the beloved mother of the family of Augustus. During a full moon a sheep was led along the Via Sacra and was sacrificed to Jupiter on June 17th, with the day named The Trust of Jupiter. Thirty-three days later, Jupiter and Regulus came together. The King planet and the King Star together. The Romans saw this as heaven's approval of Augustus in Rome. In August, four planets aligned longitudinally very close together in the Constellation Leo—Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. Roman and other ancient astronomers looked upon this as the sign of a new beginning in historical affairs. The Romans looked to Rome because of these astrological signs.

It is apparent the Magi knew of a prophecy which indicated there would be astronomical indicators of the Messiah's birth.

The Magi instead headed for Jerusalem. (The Roman students of the Magi had probably over time morphed the interpretation of certain events to apply to the Roman Empire rather than the true interpretation. Some of this would have been due to the pressure of staying loyal to the Roman rulers.)

Whether the signs, which the Magi were following, was a natural, but prophesied event, or whether it was a supernatural event, it was miraculous. Something had been foretold and it had come to pass. This author personally believe it was a combination of both.

Herod inquires (demands) of the chief priests and scribes as to where the Christ was to be born. Herod is completely convinced that the wise men are indeed looking for a real person. He is told the prophecy of Micah 5:2. Herod tells the wise men to go to Bethlehem and then come back and tell him where they find him. It is Herod's intention to kill the child. He certainly does not want a new king rising against the Roman Empire.

(In 63 B.C. there had been prophetic dreams and astrologic signs suggesting a "king of the Romans" was to be born who would become the most powerful ruler ever in the Empire. It was ordered by the

Roman Senate that all baby boys be killed. Augustus Caesar was born that year and saved from the infanticide. He grew to become the most powerful ruler the Empire had ever known. Gaius Octavius Thurinus, as he was originally named, was adopted by Julius Caesar in his will. Julius was his maternal great uncle. Herod was well-aware of the history. He did not want a repeat. He was extremely jealous of his own position.)

Before sending them on their way he finds out exactly when they first saw the star.

We know it was approximately two years before because later Herod kills all children two years and younger in the Bethlehem area. He does this when the wise men do not come back and tell him where they found Jesus. They went home a different way because God tells them not to return to Herod. The death of the children causes great grief and fulfills Jeremiah 31:15, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." (Bethlehem was a small town at the time. Estimates of the possible number of children of the ages zero to two years of age are between twenty and thirty. Small numbers do not decrease the intensity of the grief experienced in this small town.)

After the Magi visit Jesus, an angel of God tells Joseph to take his family into Egypt to save the child from Herod. When Herod has died, an angel tells Joseph he can return to Nazareth. Hosea 11:1 had foretold, "out of Egypt have I called my son." We are told in Matthew 2:23 that the prophets had foretold that Jesus would be called a Nazarene. Indeed, he spent the rest of his life growing up in Nazareth until the time of his ministry. (It has been wondered how Joseph, Mary, and Jesus survived during the time they were in Egypt. They have even been called destitute refugees by some commentators. However, God providentially had taken care of the problem. The valuable gifts they received from the Magi would easily have sustained them. Plus, Joseph was a carpenter. Even if funds from the gifts ran out, Joseph could have supported them with his work. The maximum amount of time they would have been in Egypt is two years. Herod died in early 1 B.C.)

The evidence presented thus far should dismiss any doubt that the birth of Jesus was a miraculous event. His forerunner, his presence in Mary's womb,

the place of his birth, the proclamations by numerous witnesses, his home and more, all connected with the miraculous and with prophecy.

Names and Titles of the Very Young Jesus

Consider just a few of the names and titles used, in reference to the child, Jesus. These give much more emphasis about who He is and why He came, than just an observation of a cute, sweet, little baby.

Jesus – In Matthew 1:25, Joseph called his name Jesus. Jesus means "Jehovah's salvation." In Isaiah 12:2, we read, "I will trust and not be afraid; for Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." In Hebrew, the word 'salvation' is Yeshua, or Jesus. In Psalm 9:14, David said he would rejoice in God's "salvation." Again, the word is Yeshua. In Luke 2:11, we read "unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior."

Christ – This is the Greek equivalent of Messiah, which means "anointed." In Luke 2:11, it is stated about the baby Jesus, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." It was prophesied in Psalm 45:7, "Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." He is also referenced in prophecy in Psalm 2:2 as the anointed.

King – The wise men wanted to know "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2) It was prophesied in Psalm 2:6 that God would set "my king upon my holy hill of Zion." In Jeremiah 23:5, it is stated, "I will raise unto David ...a King who shall reign and prosper."

Lord – This title denotes authority and dominion. "For unto you is born this day...Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). When Elisabeth saw Mary coming toward her, she declared, "the mother of my Lord." In Psalm 110:1, in reference to, the coming Christ, it is stated, "The Lord said unto my Lord." Jesus reiterated his right to this title in John 13:13, "Ye call me Master and Lord...so I am."

Immanuel – In Isaiah 7:14 it is stated that the virgin would conceive "...and shall call his name Immanuel." This was fulfilled in Matthew 1:23 where we find out that the name means "God with us."

Governor – This title means one who goes first, leads the way, and is chief in war. In Matthew 2:6 it is stated about Mary, "out of thee shall come a Governor." This was fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:28, "He is governor among the nations" And Zechariah 9:7, "He shall be as a governor in Judah."

Why is the miraculous birth so important?

1) If his birth is not by a virgin, then he is not God. His deity is called into question. Yet, even the demons confessed him as the Son of God in Matthew 8:29. Were they lying? Why would the demons perpetuate that lie? It would serve them no purpose.

Paul declared him to be God who purchased the church with his blood in Acts 20:28.

Peter declared him the Son of the Living God in Matthew 16:16. If Paul and Peter are wrong, then their inspiration is called into question and thus all of their other teachings.

Jesus himself declares that he is the Son of God (John 18:37; Matthew 27:11). If he is not, then he is a blasphemer and a liar. The Jews who accused him of such (John 10:30-33) would be right. Such a man certainly should not be followed in any way.

God, the Father, declared him to be his Son in Matthew 3:17 at his baptism. If he really is not, then God is a liar and cannot be counted worthy of speaking any truth.

2) His authority is impossible if he was not born of a virgin. If he is not God, then he could not be tried as required and prophesied, Isaiah 28:16. Without being properly tried he could not be the author of eternal salvation, Hebrews 5:8-9. Only the one born of a virgin was to be the one with authority, Isaiah 9:6-7.

3) His once-for-all resurrection would be impossible without the virgin birth. All other resurrected individuals died again: Lazarus and the saints at Christ's death. If no virgin birth, then no death and resurrection, Hebrews 2:14-15.

4) If no virgin birth, then no atonement is possible through his death. Hebrews 10:5 states, "A body thou hast prepared for me.... sacrifices and offerings thou wouldest not." All the sacrifices of the O.T. pointed to his on the cross (Hebrews 9:18-22; 10:1-18). If he is not God and the perfect Lamb, then he gives no atonement.

5) If there was no virgin birth, then there was no ascension and coronation. Daniel 7:9-14 tells us that the Son of Man (Christ) was brought to the throne and given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

6) His mediatorial work is impossible without the virgin birth. Hebrews 4:14-16 says he is a high priest who can be touched with our infirmities and was tempted in all ways as we are. We therefore can come boldly unto the throne of grace. But if he is not God, then he is not our mediator.

7) The 2nd Coming is impossible if he was not born of a virgin. John 16:28 quotes Jesus saying, "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father." Back in chapter 14 he stated in verses 1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God,

believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

*Without his
miraculous birth, the
crucifixion would mean
absolutely nothing.*

Conclusion

We began by bringing our attention to "the fullness of time." Indeed, the miraculous birth of Jesus came in the fullness of time. God through His providence brought all things to a zenith—everything physical and spiritual. The world was made ready for the coming of the Saviour. Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus stated in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill." He stated in Luke 24:44 that all things written by Moses, the prophets, and in the Psalms about him must be fulfilled.

We preach Christ crucified. Without his miraculous birth, the crucifixion would mean absolutely nothing. But God did become flesh. And in the flesh, he died a horrible death so that we might have the hope of eternal life in Heaven. In Matthew 1:21 we read, "She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

The steps of salvation are only possible because of Jesus being God. One has nothing to believe without the miraculous birth. There is nothing to repent of if Jesus was not God in the flesh. There is no confession if Jesus was not born of a virgin. And there is no reason to be baptized if Jesus was not the Messiah God, born of a virgin.

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IN THE HOME

Daniel Richardson

Let me begin by saying I am certainly no expert on this subject, and honestly, I decided to write on this topic because I know I needed to work on it myself and figured some others could use the encouragement also. Adulting is hard, but part of being an adult, specifically a husband and father, is being the spiritual leader of the family. This is not a task we can pass off to the church. Implicit in this is that we have to have our spiritual lives in order if we expect to be able to lead others. We have all seen too many instances of “do as I say and not as I do” to know how ineffective this leadership style is. Our wives and children are watching us and if what we do is not consistent with what we say, our leadership will be impotent.

God calls us to be the leader. Numerous scriptures attest to this (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23; Deut. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4). I don’t think any of us doubt the responsibility we have to our families to be the spiritual leaders, so I would like to spend the rest of the time dealing with how we can be better—and what happens when we do not fulfill our responsibilities.

Priorities, priorities, priorities. Our families will see our priorities and follow suit. If we do not make time for personal Bible study, our children will not have instilled in them the importance of it in their lives. One of the best gifts we can give to our children is the example of spending time in God’s word on a daily basis. This is in addition to family devotionals, which should also be a practice in our homes. We have to make the time, set it aside, and not let the cares of the world get in the way of our personal study and our family studies or devotionals. If we let things on the television (more on this later) stay on so late that we are too exhausted for family Bible time, we need to make adjustments. Our children will see where we place our priorities when it comes to personal Bible study and family devotionals.

We should be taking time to play with our children, whether games indoors or outside play. Two of our family favorites are Spades and *The Settlers of Catan*, but I found out from my wife that the children were not enjoying the games as much as I

thought because of my tone and attitude. I am glad she let me know; I know it was not easy for her to do so. I have since made adjustments and we all seem to enjoy them so much more. We must let our Christian attitude shine forth regardless of what activities we are involved in. We cannot excuse our poor sportsmanship as “just competitiveness.” We cannot excuse lousy attitudes with “that’s just how I am.” If that is just how you are, you need to make changes—the sooner the better. God calls us to improve daily, not be complacent with how we are (2 Pet. 1:5-8). Our children should be able to learn fair play, honesty, and good sportsmanship from us when we play together; and our attitude, whether we win or lose, should be Christ-like.

This next one may hit some of us pretty hard. ***We must be careful how much time we spend on devices.*** Our children should not only be able to recognize us from the top of our head because our face is buried in a cell phone or tablet. If we have to hand them off to our spouse or leave them in our bedroom, so be it. We must not let our children believe that our lives revolve around our mobile devices.

While we are on the topic of electronics, let’s cover our entertainment choices. Our children know what we watch on TV, what we watch at the theater, and what we watch on our phones. Do we allow things in our homes via electronics that we would not allow in our homes otherwise? Is sex and nudity (partial or otherwise) permitted in our entertainment choices? Is profanity permitted in our homes via electronics when we would never permit such to occur in our homes from those that live or visit there? Are we allowing our entertainment choices to mold our children’s minds more than the Bible does? I must confess that I am somewhat numb to profanity because of my workplace. That does not give me a pass on what I choose to listen to or what I bring into our home for the family to hear. As the spiritual leader, we must be willing to turn off what is not appropriate.

This next one hits hard for me. I grew up in a family where aggressive driving was the norm;

when I say aggressive, think of the most aggressive driver you know and then multiply it by 10 or more. Speeding, erratic lane changes, tailgating (not football related), name-calling, using turn lanes for passing lanes: these were all normal for my childhood. Guess what, I brought those same habits to my life as an adult. I am blessed to be married to one of the godliest women you could meet and she pointed out to me the inconsistencies of my driving habits and the Christian life. She asked me what I would do if one of the people I stared down, sped past, or tailgated pulled into the church parking lot behind me or saw me later somewhere else. My opportunity to influence that person for Christ would more than likely be gone. You cannot get back a bad first impression. We need to remember that we want every first impression (and every impression thereafter) to be of a follower of Christ. Our children watch our driving habits. Do we consistently set our cruise control to 5 miles per hour above the speed limit? Is that against the law? Is it easy to follow the speed limit? For some it is, for me it is not. But even something so small as following the speed limit can have an impact on our children. I have two teenagers driving right now and a third will get his learner's permit before this issue goes to print. I wish I had instilled better driving habits in myself before they were born; I am definitely reaping where I sowed on this front.

Many of us come in contact with those less fortunate than ourselves. Our interactions with these individuals are teaching opportunities for our children. How we handle these situations will influence our children one way or another. Do we turn our noses up and scoff at the situation they have gotten themselves into or do we listen, truly listen, and see if and how we can help? The parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) teaches us to have **compassion**, take **care** of the needs, see it to **completion**, and that it may be **costly**: time, effort, and money. Bobby Duncan once said in a class on church leaders, "In the work of benevolence, many mistakes will be made; let's be sure that most are made on the side of mercy" (paraphrased to the best of my memory).

The final point I will mention is our children watch and learn so much from how we interact with our spouse. Do we complement them or berate them in front of the children? Do our children see that our spouse is the most important person in this world to

us? Do we let others run our spouses over? As husbands, we must love our wives, cherish our wives, provide for our wives and protect our wives (Eph. 5:25-33; Col. 3:19; 1 Tim. 5:8). Our children will learn from us how to treat their spouses; let us give them the gift of seeing a godly marriage in practice.

As I mentioned, I was raised in a house where aggressive driving was the norm. I didn't mention that I also grew up in a family where being competitive in games could lead to un-Christlike behavior. Many of us have to change learned behaviors to be effective leaders in our own families. We cannot afford for the status quo to go on. We also cannot make excuses that we do not know any better because of how we were raised. It comes to a point where we have to take responsibility for our actions and make changes where necessary. These are not easy for many reasons. One, we may not even realize what we have been doing to be wrong; it is just what we've always done. I am thankful that my wife was willing and able to point these things out to me. Two, in recognizing that we need to make changes based on how we were raised, we have to admit our parents could have done better. This is always true though. Our own children will be able to say that I should have done better. Good parents realize they are not perfect and they want their children to do better than they themselves did.

When we do not fulfill our responsibilities of being the spiritual leader, our families will find other sources for guidance. It may be someone else in the church or maybe even someone in the world from an industry such as movie, music, or fashion. They will look somewhere even if they do not realize it. If we do not fulfill our obligations, they will get fulfilled by someone and our children's souls will be the cost to pay if that somewhere is of the world.

As we stated in the beginning, much of being a spiritual leader is having our priorities in order. Our children learn so much from us when we do not even realize they are watching us. We must be aware of our influence, all the time, and mindful that our children are like sponges when it comes to watching us and learning from us. They deserve our best. They deserve an example of Christ in our homes.

KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

Kyle D. Frank

Jude 1:21: keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Our relationship with our Heavenly father is a result of several things. Hopefully we can see in these the blessings we enjoy in relationship like this.

First of all, Jude gives a straightforward command that WE are to keep OURSELVES in the love of God. There is something for us to do. If we look to verse 20 we see: *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.* How are we to build ourselves up? Well, it says on our most holy faith. The faith is the vehicle that does the work. We know a great deal about our faith. The first thing that pops up is from the gospel song “Faith is the victory... that overcomes the world.”

Looking on, we see that:

Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you: abide ye in my love. 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 15:9-10).

Keeping God's commandments is connected with keeping ourselves in the love of God.

Next: 1 John 4:16:

And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth does in him.

We are to abide in God's love. Then we are in Him and He in us. This is a powerful part of building ourselves up—by abiding in Him.

Next, we look into the term “**abide**.” It is found throughout the scriptures.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples (John 8:31).

As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father (1 John 2:24).

A great deal is said about abiding—ultimately abiding in God. What more could we do than to abide in God? This is the ultimate way of building ourselves up.

Next, we are told we must be looking for the mercy of our Lord. It is everything that we really need. I look back at my life—especially the 29 years since my baptism—and know the only hope I have is that my Lord is merciful and kind. I make mistakes—just like you—every day of my life. We must always look to his mercy in all that we do.

Mercy is another word that we should seek to know. The Greek word is ELEOS: “...the outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it.” If that doesn't fit, then I don't know what does. Let us always be seeking God's mercy and compassion.

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Rom. 9:15)

Eph. 2:4 says:

...but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.

And: Heb. 4:16:

Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy.

These passages show that God is merciful and is willing to bestow that mercy upon us, provided we manifest the proper attitude towards Him—repentance. Repentance is the key which opens many locks that we each face.

If we maintain this attitude we will overcome the trials designed to ensnare many

The Forgotten "IF" In Forgiving Others

Ray Sullins

We have all heard statements before like: "I will if you do," "What if we did it this way instead of that way," or "If only I had listened, I wouldn't be in this predicament." All of these statements are made with clear conditions being set.

In the Bible we have so many important ideas and words present in the text. Different nouns and parts of speech that have a life-altering affect in who we are and what we should do. Some of these words appear literally hundreds of times in the text and have a profound influence on what God wants of those who are faithful.

However, sometimes it is the little words in our speech that are overlooked. These words seem so small that they are insignificant and read past in a flash. We fly by them, trying to get to the heart or meat of the matter at hand. Thus, we often fail to realize their great importance and value.

In this discussion, we want to consider just such a word which is found in the Bible. A small conjunction, as it is classified in our language. As you might recall, a conjunction is a word that connects two words or a group of words. The specific type of conjunction we are considering in this lesson is called a subordinate conjunction. A Subordinate Conjunction deals with connected words or groups of words which show the relationship between the two clauses (a dependent and an independent clause). These clauses are not considered equal in importance. However, they are connected and both required to complete the meaning intended. So as we saw in our earlier example, "I will go, if you do," this statement is being made with a condition. The fact is stated that I will go, but you must as well.

For this study, we will now go to God's Word and strive to understand the importance of the word "IF" in relationship to our overall theme of forgiveness! Together we will attempt to explore how such a small word plays such a monumental role in teaching us about forgiveness. On the other hand,

we might consider that although a little word, "if" appears over 1450 times in God's Word, which might indicate to us the great need we have to investigate it and to comprehend its true meaning in the text.

Our main text for consideration is Luke 17:1-4, let's read this together:

"And he said unto his disciples, It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come; but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were well for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (ASV).

The word "if" is found four times in this one text alone, so let's see what part it plays in this beautiful teaching of Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like if you never had to worry about "stumbling" or "offenses?" This would be from one of two standpoints: whether you are the one being challenged to stumble, or whether you are the one causing someone else to stumble. In this text Jesus is first warning His disciples to realize that "occasions of stumbling," would come; however, "woe" to him through whom they come. Have you ever been guilty of doing something or saying something and causing someone to stumble? Like it or not, we all have been guilty of such, so what do we need to understand about this truth? Well, in verse two Jesus goes on to say, "It were well for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." This means that it would be better if we put a millstone around our neck and drowned, rather than to cause someone to stumble by our

words or deeds.

Paul deals with this same teaching when writing to the Corinthian brethren. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 we read,

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak. For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore, that I cause not my brother to stumble.”

No doubt the Corinthians were dealing with the same problems in their day, as those in the days of Jesus. However, here Paul clarifies that when we cause someone to stumble in such a way, we sin (verse 13). We know as Christians that when we sin it can further lead to death. May we strive to never cause others to stumble or to sin against their God!

In verse 3 of our main text, we find another important “if” for consideration. Jesus starts this verse with an exhortation to “take heed to yourselves,” as if to say take a closer personal look and listen up because this is for you. Then he makes this statement, “If thy brother sin, rebuke him.” In the King James Version it reads like this, “if thy brother trespass against thee.” What we are dealing with here is when someone sins against me, and the question is, “what must I do?” The verse says, “if” this happens, “rebuke him!” It doesn’t say, “if you feel like it,” “if you want to,” or “if you don’t like him,” it clearly says “rebuke him!” So why should I rebuke my brother when he sins against me?

Now notice what the last phase of verse 3 says, “and if he repent, forgive him!” There is another one of those “if’s.” If he repents, I must forgive! That’s really clear, isn’t it? The fact is, we are not the judge and jury of his mind and heart. Nor are we the thought police. Jesus clearly commands us to forgive the one who repents! Are we willing to submit to the precept of Christ?

Jesus teaches this same truth in a parallel to this text, found in the Gospel of Christ according to Matthew. First notice what He says in chapter 18,

verses 3-7:

“and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me: But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!”

Sounds familiar doesn’t it? But now move on down in the same text to verses 15-17. There we read:

“And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.”

You see, Jesus did give a clear plan for dealing with those who sin against us. Praise be to God for His wondrous guidance in His Holy Word. Also let me encourage us to see the true objective and motive for our actions in such a situation. They are clearly to cause one to repent and to return to faithful service before God, as well as to restore pure fellowship between us as brethren.

Our last verse in the text takes our discussion yet another step further, by helping us to understand just how far we must be willing to go when forgiving others. Verse four begins by saying, “And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Herein lies the true depth and sacrifice required for forgiveness, our willingness to go far enough. Too often we are willing to forgive but on our terms and in our own way. Furthermore, we rarely feel merciful enough to offer someone a se-

cond or third chance, let alone seven chances.

Back in Matthew 18, Jesus is asked a question by Peter which deals with this very point. In verse 21 we read, “Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?” Obviously the disciples were struggling with this same issue in forgiveness. They were showing a willingness to forgive, but wondering how long we have to forgive or put up with someone doing them wrong. Now notice what Jesus said, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.” This is a pretty clear and obvious point Jesus was trying to make here. Despite this fact, many still look for the loopholes and some act as if they are keeping score as far as those who sin against them. The real question is, “Do we have a true and complete spirit of forgiveness,” just as our God did. Think of all that our Creator has forgiven and put up with in each of

us, yet we are going to be so petty as to refuse to forgive others for their wrongs repented of? How sad!

Are you prepared for offenses that may come? Are you making sure you are not a stumbling block to those around you? May we all submit fully to God’s plan of forgiveness. Will we acknowledge what our Lord and Savior has asked of us? The lesson is clear: First, willing to rebuke a brother “if” he sins against us; Second, being willing to forgive him “if” he repents of it; And finally, proving our faithfulness by forgiving time and time again, “if” he continues to sin and repent.

The choice of faithfulness is ours. However, “if” we want to receive the rewards of God, we had better learn to submit to and obey all the commandments which He has taught us.

Do you practice the forgiveness of God?

EARLY REFORMATIVE MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE

Kyle Frank

The beginning of the Restoration Movement isn’t a date that we can write down on our calendar and proclaim “There it was” or “God has set it up.” The birth of the early Restoration Movement in America coincided with the “Second Great Awakening” as it has come to be known by historians studying this period of history.

It was a time for individuals, whose hearts were aflame with the Spirit and the love of God, to seek to spread the gospel, civilize the “heathen,” and to do that which their flaming hearts guided them in doing. This type of action was foretold by Luke the Apostle. In Luke 8:11 Jesus is answering a question that his disciples had, and he makes a very short sentence which would have very long consequences for the newly formed kingdom of God. Jesus said “The seed is the word of God.” That was something that had very long implications. Anywhere the seed—the “Word of God” was, then the possibility of having the Kingdom of God forming was a very real possibility. In fact, with but little effort expended it is possible to see the Kingdom in any number of places at any number of times. That is the basic principle we will examine.

Some groups came into existence by one or more

men who relied on the scriptures as their only means of construction. Unfortunately, there are groups that came into existence and then departed from what instructions God gave and they went out of existence.

A good example of this is in the book of Revelation where Jesus said that if they repented not, their candle would be put out of its place. This happened to the church at Ephesus, which was warned and eventually ceased to be. This must be a very clear and mindful warning to those of us who seek to walk the path given by our Lord. It can happen. You can fall away and you will read of some of these who did just that. Their history might still be written, but spiritually they are cold, dead, and dark. Let us then pay close attention to the words of the Savior and do what he says to do. Where he sends, we will go. What he says, we will do. That is the only way that things will correctly work; so, let us get about our duty and do them.

Traditions of Men versus the Word of God in Europe

We could open a whole new can of worms if we start comparing what group A was doing versus what B was doing. This did happen over the many

years, and we could look to the Catholic Church to see an example of this. One example is the Jesuits, who were trying to do what they thought to be scriptural. An earlier movement, the monastic, had men living in caves and deserts, all trying to do what they thought of as scriptural. The Benedictine Monks were another. We could go on and on listing men who, like Benedict, had ideas and ran with them. The fruit of such ideas is the modern Catholic Church with all of its groups and heresies. That will continue until the Lord comes and we could be going down endless rabbit holes unless we correct our course and turn back to doing Bible things in Bible ways. That will stop the reproduction of this principle in the Protestant “flavor.” We must look to the scriptures and to the directions given therein to find the true church, the one approved by God, described in his word and walk therein.

The early pioneers of the Restoration Movement could be found anywhere at any time. All it took was a copy of the scriptures and an open heart. Small groups popped up in Europe after the reformation had occurred. People were now able to get a copy of the scriptures in their own language whereas earlier the Catholic Church would confiscate and destroy any they found. The likelihood was the possessor of said copy would be destroyed as well. Men, women, and children were often slain by the Inquisition and other loyal groups like the Jesuits mentioned earlier. Life was cheap.

No wonder that all true followers of Christ began to sever their ties with the degenerated state churches of Rome and Constantinople. Persecuted by the Roman and Orthodox Catholics as they had been persecuted by the heathen emperors, they continued to try to serve God in simplicity and truth in the deep of the woods of Armenia, in the deserts of North Africa, and in the valleys of the Alps and Pyrenees. From these countries some heroic missionaries of New Testament Christianity penetrated into Central Europe, eager to restore the great fundamental truths in the churches.

In 1052, a group of Churches was started in Central Germany. From them came the most dedicated preachers. Unfortunately, the German Emperor had them burnt at the stake. It is said that they were singing God’s praise from amidst the flames, and they could not be stopped nor silenced until the flames had done their work of destruction.

At a later time, two small countries in the west

became strongholds for Christ in Central Europe. In the Netherlands in 1146, believers were imprisoned. While in the prison they spoke of churches as being active in Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Alsace Lorraine. Persecution was soon to overwhelm those small enclaves for Christ. Wherever the truth is to be found, error is quickly at hand. Those who spoke the truth faced breaking of arms and legs, by torture and the flames. They were referred to as “Christengemeine” or, “church of Christ.” They faced multiple hunters, those of the Catholic Church as well as the errors of sectarian denominations.

Both the Catholics and the German Emperors suppressed the “Christen” or Christians. Heroic Missionaries, Gruneisen, Heinrich von Schlieben, and Anna von Weiler were to face horrible deaths. But their deaths were not in vain. As the Sixteenth Century dawned, Martin Luther came onto the scene and the rest is all history.

Those who followed the Bible continued to be persecuted but they never recanted and faced death with a song in their hearts and the word of God upon their lips. Let us be ready to face the same thing because it surely will have to happen again.

The end of the churches of Christ in Europe was to come with the rise of Adolph Hitler in Germany and the invasion of nearly all countries throughout Europe which had Christians who struggled to serve Christ, from eons past. When the Nazis came to power, we all know that the Jews were his target. Also, homosexuals, the handicapped, and any that did not fit their plan. Well, another group hunted unto extinction were all those who sought to worship God according to Spirit and Truth. They were rounded up by the SS and the Einsatzgruppen, which were to follow the troops in overcoming the all those who did not fit their mold. So, those of us who follow God’s word should know that our forbearers died behind the wires of concentration camps. They faced being worked to death, or the subject of horrible medical experiments, or simply “the showers” of Treblinka or Sobibor or any number of places in the Reich.

When we consider their experiences, what are our minor inconveniences, persecution by others or any other problems that we might face? It is of nothing... Let us remember them and honor them by serving Christ with all of our heart, soul and might.

Reference source: “Gemeinde Christi” by Hans Grimm

THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE; LET ALL THE EARTH KEEP SILENCE BEFORE HIM

Bill Howard

Habakkuk was a prophet of God about whom little is known. Though it is probably not exact, the writing of the book of Habakkuk is generally accepted by Bible scholars as around the year 600 BC. This takes place in a vision that he received.

His history begins with him questioning God. He was a preacher in the final days before the fall of Judah. He sees the evil that is prevalent in Judah and asks the question: How long will it go unpunished.

“How long O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! ‘Violence is everywhere!’ I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence” (Habakkuk 1:2-3 NLT).

He, like many of us today, wonders why God allows the wicked to prosper. He relates that all he sees around him is evil and mayhem; justice is perverted. He questions the reasons for its existence and why God allows it. What Habakkuk does not comprehend is that humans cannot fathom the timing and actions of the Living God. The Lord replied,

“Look around at the nations; look and be amazed! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it. I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands. They are notorious for their cruelty and do whatever they like” (vs. 5-7).

What man cannot see and cannot know, God does see and know, and He has His methods of dealing with the circumstances. God is omnipresent; there is nothing hidden from Him. He is omnipotent and omniscient, all powerful and all knowing. He would use the Babylonians, who were far more evil than the Jews, to punish Judah, but would in His time punish the Babylonians for their sins also. Habakkuk had to learn that regardless of circumstances, God is always in control.

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, says the Lord. And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Christians often feel like Habakkuk. We look around and see the sin, the pain, the wickedness, and wonder why God isn’t acting to stop it.

As we read this, we have just put the year 2020 behind us; it is over and done with. All the accomplishments we intended and didn’t accomplish are now moot issues; they will never again be a challenge or an intended goal in 2020. We boldly and questionably face whatever is to be in the New Year. 2020 was a year fraught with debilitating illness, treacherous lawlessness, precarious rioting, a bitterly divided world, and political unrest in the entire world. The significant offset to all this is the beautiful and bountiful blessings from God our Heavenly Father.

Early on, we were stricken with a worldwide pandemic, the Covid-19 Virus that caused millions of deaths in total. In the United States alone, it is estimated there were over eighteen million cases of the virus causing more than 333,000 deaths. Final figures for the year are not available, and it has been stated by some that cases have been underestimated and other medical entities claim that the cases have been overestimated by as much as forty percent. Whatever the exact count might be, the pandemic has created personal, business, and industrial chaos.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, police on a routine call, someone trying to pass a fake twenty dollar bill, a man died while being held down by an officer, which incited the most violent riots in the history of our nation. Forty eight of the fifty largest cities in the nation were inflicted with the destructive riots that destroyed billions of dollars in property, cost hundreds of people their homes and businesses, and dozens were killed. The total cost is yet to be determined, but it is estimated to be nearing

three billion dollars. As a result of the protests, a defunding of the Police and law enforcement entities was called for and created further hatred and division in our country. The end result of this is yet to be realized.

In 2020, more than 863,000 violent deaths, called abortions, cost the lives of that many unwanted children in the United States alone. That is down from 1.6 million in 1990, but still a national travesty. Worldwide, the estimate from Worldometer is that there will be 3.5 million abortions per month. Since the ruling by the Supreme Court in 1973 in the Roe vs. Wade case, there has been over 61 million abortions in the US. There also are some elected officials in Washington pushing for tax-payer funding for this and the repeal of the Hyde amendment. The Hyde amendment barred the use of federal funds for any abortion other than to save the mother or in case of incest or rape. They also will push to overturn Pro-Life laws in all states, thereby giving the federal government total control.

2020 saw the spending of 176 billion dollars in legalized gambling in the United States. These are figures of reported gambling. There is no way of computing the money spent on illegal gambling. Gambling that ruins marriages and tears families apart. Along with this, we suffered close to 100,000 alcohol-related deaths, and the report of more than 30 million illegal drug users in our country alone. Again, ruining lives, breaking up families, destroying marriages—and there is no way of calculating the cost of bankruptcies related to this.

Perhaps, we, like Habakkuk, will be inclined to question God. We view the violence and injustice in the world today, the turmoil and chaos that is prevalent, the upsets and disappointments, and are made to question: How long O Lord? However, we, as did Habakkuk, must recognize that in spite of all circumstances, God is in control. The prophet accepted this truth. His final thoughts acknowledged this. This prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk:

“Lord, I have heard the report about you; Lord, I stand in awe of your deeds. Revive your work in these years; make it known in these years. In your wrath remember mercy” (Hab. 3:1-2).

Again:

“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights” (3:18-19).

We must take courage from past history.

“But Moses told the people fleeing Egypt ‘Don’t be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm;’” (Exodus 14:13-14).

The Psalmist stated: “Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10). There are times we have to know to let God take care of our needs. We try always to do what we can, God wants us to do our part, but there comes a time when we must back off and turn everything over to God.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverb 3:5, KJV).

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Moses told the Israelites:

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, destroy them” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

God is. “I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

God is the all-sufficient never failing refuge of his children. We are not alone; we stand with our ever-present rock and know that we will be victorious in the conflicts we face in this life. We know He is in his temple, and we stand in silent awe of our Creator and watch His mighty works.

As a new year begins let us pray for strength and guidance. Let us face the challenges that present themselves before us with full knowledge that God will be our benefactor and will lead us in the paths we must follow if we but ask.

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THE VOICE OF MARY

John Krivak

There is a specially knowing voice to be heard in the early beginnings of the Gospel of Luke. As with all Gospel writings generally, these early narratives in Luke are indebted to heavy influence from the Old Testament, and they show traces of Luke's larger themes that indicate his purposes for writing this Gospel (and Acts). The character of this particular section is very Semitic, as though original material, written or spoken perhaps in Hebrew, had been translated into "flavored" Greek. Some commentators speculate that Luke purposely adopts a style that imitates the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT), so as to give the material greater authority. Modern preachers sometimes mimic the archaic English of the KJV for the same effect. Also in these texts, the Gospel reader is given information that would only be known by someone familiar with very early events in Galilee.

A more satisfying explanation is that Luke used Mary, mother of Jesus, as a source. She would have spoken a Semitic tongue, whether Aramaic or Hebrew. In making this claim it is acknowledged that the source also could be identified with any close acquaintance of Mary (such as Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, or a sibling of Jesus, etc.). Others may have known Mary well enough to speak for her. Some suggest that it may have been a disciple of John the Baptist, which would go on to explain the origin of material in Chapter Three. But whether we have it directly from her, or perhaps mediated through another person, Luke allows us to hear the voice of Mary speaking.

In the first two chapters, the mother of Jesus is referred to six times, and she is referred to by name another eleven times. Most events described here are unique to Luke and are not found in Matthew, Mark, or John:

- The visitation of the angel Gabriel in the Jerusalem Temple to Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist).¹
- The in-pregnancy visits of Mary and Elizabeth (mother of John).

- The announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary, replete with many details not found in the telling by Matthew.
- The naming of John the Baptist at his birth.
- The stylized prayers by the parents of children promised by God—the "Magnificat" by Mary and the "Benedictus" by Zechariah.
- The census that prompted the journey to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.
- The angelic visit to shepherds and their visit to Mary.
- The post-birth sacrifice for Mary's purification involving two doves or pigeons.
- The visits of Simeon and Anna to Mary while Jesus was still an infant.²
- The visit of boy Jesus to the Temple after ducking His parents.

Mary—and perhaps she only—would have had the proximity to know these events in such detail. Commenting on Gabriel's prophecy of Jesus' birth (1:26-28), I. Howard Marshall² writes: "The story itself is of such a character that it must be based upon information ultimately by Mary herself, or be a theological construction, or be a combination of the two." Notice that we also find introspective remarks revealing Mary's inner thoughts:

- "*But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was*" (Luke 1:29, NASB).
- "*But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart*" (Luke 2:19, NASB).
- "*And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him*" (Luke 2:33, NASB).
- "*...and His mother treasured all these things in her heart*" (Luke 2:51, NASB).

¹ See my article "An Unusual Answer to Prayer," *The Quarterly* Vol. 2, No. 2 (April 2018), pp. 71-75.

² *The Gospel of Luke, NIGTC*, I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 63.

Now, it may be that these interior insights were editorially surmised by Luke, or that he was even given insight by Divine inspiration as a writer of Scripture. But it looks quite possible that Luke shared a chat with Mary, and that she was one of the “eyewitnesses” that he researched before writing (1:1-4). If so, it is the voice of Mary that we hear.

Four Gospels; but just one gospel

There is one gospel—the Good News “kingdom” message that has the saving acts of Jesus as its nucleus: His Cross-death, the burial in a tomb, the resurrection to life and Lordship, and the after-death-alive appearances to eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:1-8). There is one gospel and there can be no other (Galatians 1:8-9). But there are four Gospels—four Bible books which tell of the saving acts of Jesus. Each bears the name of its author in the title: the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.

The four are somewhat similar to one another, yet each is distinctly unique. Having the four separate narratives—rather than a single conglomerate gospel—tells the story of Jesus with fuller dimension. These four³ are complementary and in agreement—like hearing reports of a vital event through four witnesses. John’s Gospel stands out as most unique, presenting words and deeds of Jesus usually not found in the other three. Those three are called “synoptic” because they share a related editorial viewpoint. It looks like Matthew and Luke each built additional material onto the framework provided by Mark—if so, Mark was the earliest to be written.⁴ Two factors explain what gives each Synoptic (and John) a different flavor.

First, each Gospel drew material about Jesus from different sources. Luke begins (1:1-4) by telling of the research project that was done before he started writing. He carefully drew information from reputable sources like “eyewitnesses” (including, no

doubt, actual apostles of Jesus) and “*servants of the Word*” (Christian ministers from the earliest days). We already said the early Gospel of Mark was a primary source for two others. Yet we find in Matthew and Luke additional shared material not found in Mark. And this is often so nearly word-for-word alike that it seems to indicate a shared written source. It is referred to simply as “Q”. I believe that written accounts of the words and deeds of Jesus were put to paper even before our Gospels appeared.⁵ It is thought that some of the unique material in Luke must have come from a source in Galilee. This source gave Luke access to events “*from the beginning*” (Luke 1:4)—and the beginning place where all four Gospels start is with the forerunner to Jesus, John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 16:16; Acts 1:21-22).

I do not wish to startle any reader with fears that such theories of Gospel composition threaten our

*Each Gospel writer
selected material and
shaped it to teach about
Jesus in a unique way.*

belief in the God-breathed inspiration of these Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). Speaking as we have of human “sources” (whether a person, like Mary; or their writings, such as “Q”) may seem to force a choice between the Holy Spirit or with people as the actual “source” of God’s

Word. Sometimes God gives His penman (for example, a prophet or an apostle) a message that is dictated word-for-word—and such procedure leaves neither the need nor the room for any human input. But the Spirit sometimes works in other ways to get God’s truth written for us to read. As Luke begins his Gospel (1:1-4), he explains that he arrived at “*the exact truth*” by means of a research project. That is to say, he consulted “*those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word*” and used them as sources for what he would write. The Holy Spirit, then, can also work this way to inspire Scripture. And in doing so, the use of accurate history was essential to the process. The Gospels are the inspired Word of God.

³ Only four Gospels belong in the Bible. It has become trendy to accept additional non-canonical “gospels” (such as the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*). For a helpful evaluation and the complete text (in English) of all such writings, see Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008).

⁴ It is admitted that there are ancient writers (2nd and 3rd century) who state Matthew’s gospel was written first, followed by Mark and Luke, then John.

⁵ For too long, it has been common for scholars to accentuate the time-gap between the days of Jesus and the earliest appearance of the Gospels. And, they often refer to this as a time of “oral transmission” that left Jesus traditions vulnerable to alterations resulting in unreliability. For myself, I think Jesus—by both word and deed—would have attracted writing reporters (scribes) very quickly (Matt. 13:52). These writings could be referenced by Gospel writers to ensure accuracy.

Second, each Gospel writer selected material and shaped it to teach about Jesus in a unique way. This is called “redaction.” Mark has no genealogy of the ancestors of Jesus. Matthew and Luke do have genealogies that are significantly different—each seems designed to advance themes important to that particular Gospel. Careful readers will pick up on subtle clues that indicate the unique redactions of each Gospel and will be blessed as they enhance our understanding of Jesus. Here is one to try. The prophet Jeremiah is mentioned four times in the NT; three of them are in Matthew—once in the beginning, once at the ending, and once in between.⁶ Study them and try to see how the prophet (and quotations from his OT book) deepen and enrich Matthew’s presentation of Jesus. No other Gospel mentions Jeremiah.

Redaction may also sound frightful, if by this we suppose our four Evangelists are merely using their imaginations to color their depictions of Jesus. This is not the case. They began with a clear and accurate knowledge of Jesus. Then they selected from available materials what to include or exclude to portray the true Jesus. They used their best writing skills to explain, to illustrate, to emphasize—all the while intending to connect their readers with the Jesus they knew, loved, and worshiped. The Holy Spirit watched over their every effort and authorial decision to guarantee truth.⁷ We know this by the result—the glorious quality of the Gospels.

Although a few cranks try to play-up differences among the four Gospels to accuse them of contradictions, most of us do not see the “mole hills” as insurmountable mountains. Take the “temple cleansing” in which Jesus forcefully throws the money-changers out of the Jerusalem Temple. In the three Synoptic Gospels, this event occurs at the end of Jesus’ ministry and precipitates His execution. But in John, the account is placed at the beginning. Contradiction? Has somebody got their facts wrong? Actually, close reading of all accounts make it plausible that Jesus cleansed the Temple not once, but

twice.⁸

We are given a lively and multidimensional portrayal of Jesus as told in our four Gospels. Four, but together they proclaim the single Good News gospel that springs from the saving acts of God—the gospel of the Cross.

Mary Across Luke’s Gospel

We meet Mary early, a mere Jewish girl—too inexperienced through youth to understand a man as husband, to have mothered children or managed a family—let alone to know the ways of God. If she has any special ability or aptitude, it is known only to God (and perhaps to Gabriel).

When, as we suppose, she chatted with Luke as he carefully took notes, she was now the aging Jewish mother of adult children, likely a grandmother. Her famous son, Jesus, had died a cruel death—yet even from infancy, a death tied up with Good News events. She speaks as a mother whose heart is full of childhood reminiscences that no aging could fade. She tells of them, bubbling over to anyone who will listen,

We are given a lively and multidimensional portrayal of Jesus in our four Gospels.

as though it were only yesterday—how that Child grew! She sees the whole process in reflection of the amazing God-events that sent Jesus into her virginal womb and then brought Him into the world. She pondered and pondered as boyhood

became manhood, and her Jesus was revealed as the Christ of ancient promise. The heart of old Mary held fast every treasure from the earliest days.

Pain also plundered her heart, as sword thrusts into her very soul. Simeon spoke hard truth that proved prophetic: “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35). Mary remembered that vividly and shared it with Luke. No privilege or special treatment ever came to the mother of God’s Son: no room at the inn (“I think my contractions are starting!”), fleeing from murderous politicians, and maybe worst of all—worrying (as a Jewish mother will) about what people will think; about what the people will say, when

⁶ See my article “Gates of Hades,” *The Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 2019), pp. 55-58.

⁷ It is said that statements are true because they are in the Bible. Rather, they are in the Bible because they are true!

⁸ See, for example, the insightful harmonization by D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 175-180.

her boy acts out in public: “I don’t care if you are the messiah, that’s no way to act in public! People will talk!” She was a mother. Still, Jesus was provoked and saw her mothering as a detriment that interfered with His ministry. Jesus quickly put distance between the family of His upbringing—and He claimed the followers in the ministry as a new family (Luke 8:19ff.). She first saw this tendency emerge when the boy was just twelve, talking like the Temple was true home, the place of his true Father. Mary pondered and tried to understand, but pain filled her heart.

That break that divided Jesus and Mary would take a harder edge. In preaching, the family was said to be the place to find enemies (12:49ff.). Yet, peace within the family is every mother’s greatest hope. Still, He would say to anyone that would listen: *“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:26). We might wonder if

Mary heard of this incident and ponder her reaction: *“While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’ But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it’”* (Luke 11:27-28).

Finally, Mary’s Jesus was crucified. She was there, but Luke doesn’t say so. Maybe she didn’t tell him, couldn’t find the words to speak of it. In the Fourth Gospel, John shares the tender moment when Jesus, from the Cross, gave John to His mother and gave His mother to the apostle. Mary told Luke about the times that filled her heart, and it all seemed to go back to the early days in Galilee. She was a mother and Jesus was her boy—lots of memories, each a joy to relive. But then Jesus left home and crossed the Jordan to meet John; then the ministry; then the Cross. Luke would have to consult his other sources about all of that. There was here only silence from the voice of Mary.

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GIVE ME TRUTH

Gus Nichols

(Note: This previously unpublished poem was found, handwritten, among items from his library)

Give me truth – just plain Bible truth –
Which is good for old age and youth.
I want the whole counsel of God
Before I return unto the sod.
Keep back nothing that's good for me:
A true Christian I want to be.
I'm determined to follow Christ,
Who died for me – was sacrificed.

Yes, give me truth – It I will do;
For in John eight, verse thirty two,
Our Savior said, as you may see,
It is the truth that makes man free.
All must know the word of the Lord,
To follow Him in one accord.
Obeying truth purifies the soul
That heaven may become our goal.

It's not enough to know the truth,
It should be believed from early youth.
Through belief of truth we are saved,
Become Christians, and well behaved.
Many souls live in starvation,
For the words of true salvation.
The gospel is the very power
Of God to save until the hour.



3 WAYS

The Gospel is Still Needed Today

CHRIS GARDNER

Introduction:

In all the hardships we have had to deal with this last year, and all the changes, and all the juggling we have had to do to just keep some level of consistency with our lives and with our service—one thing that has remained the same and will until the end of time is the world's need for the gospel of Christ. For people today are just as in need of the gospel as they have ever been.

This lesson was developed from a quote by brother Phil Sanders and his article “Faithful Growing” written in the *Spiritual Sword*, Pressing On, Jan. 2007, p 3.

In any and every culture, the thing people need most is the gospel. People still need a faith to live by, a hope to live for, and a love to live with.

These three factors were true 2000 years ago when the gospel message was first being preached and they are still true today.

People still need a faith to live by.

The need to worship. One of the major reasons we can defend that evolution is a farce and that we are the product of a sovereign God who created all things on this earth and in the heavens in six literal days (Ex. 20:11) is the fact that we as humans need something to worship.

From the beginning of our creation we learn how Adam taught his sons Cain and Abel to offer worship up to God through sacrifices. We latter learn

how Cain's descendant's being cast out by God, made new gods to follow and practiced all sorts of demonic practices all in the name of worship.

Today, if a person would go to the remotest parts of the earth, and if they found people, those people would be worshipping something. God has instilled in humans something that makes us very different from all the other life forms on this planet: we have an inner desire to worship *something*.

God's message of hope. But God didn't stop there. God taught man *how* He wanted to be worshipped.

This patriarchal form of worship, done mostly through the offering of sacrifices, continued on into the first century, for we read in the tenth chapter of the book of Acts how Cornelius, a Roman centurion (a Gentile), offered up to God alms and prayers and was heard by God, and was instructed to seek Peter to teach him what he must now do to be saved.

A promise was made by God that through Abraham's descendants a great nation would rise, and when Abraham's descendants were in the millions, God called Moses to come and lead a nation of slaves out of captivity. God gave them the Law, which was a complicated set of rules and commands that these chosen people were to keep until the time of the Messiah.

It was then in the fullness of time that this Messiah came to *not only* save the nation of Israel... but also *all* those Gentiles who were willing to hear and obey God's truth. The doctrine of salvation, preached to the Jews in the first century by the Mes-

siah's disciples, and also to the Samaritan people, and men like Cornelius (who represented the Gentile nation) was the gospel.

A faith to live by. The gospel of Christ offered those people of the first century who were looking for God's instruction the new guidelines in how they were to be saved, how to worship, and how to be guided to live. And this gospel is still the same gospel that is to be preached and followed today.

Because people in this sense have not changed and are still looking for something to worship, God has given us His Son and His teachings to fulfill that inner yearning that is deep within us all.

The gospel also gives us the truth of God's will, so that we can not only be saved from our sins and have a relationship with our Maker, but also have deeper, more fulfilling lives.

While many in the world reject the gospel and fill this void in their soul with materialism, entertainment, and lust, such things in the end will only leave them empty... and eternally lost. But the gospel offers hope, grants rewards, and gives direction, which are all things that most people are looking for in life.

Application. Simply put, in Christ is the answer to all things we face. The gospel grants us the best life one can live in this world ruled by Satan. People haven't changed, since God has been using the same mold since Adam. And we, being wired the way that we are, need a faith we can trust, believe, and get behind.

But this isn't the only thing that the gospel offers; it also offers us a hope that we can look forward to.

A Hope to Live For.

Eternity in our hearts. Just as we discussed how God has placed in each human being the desire to worship something, God also has placed within each of us the sense of something beyond this world.

While many in the world today have convinced themselves that this present life is all that there is, the majority of people today still believe in the afterlife. In the most recent Rasmussen poll I could find on the belief in the afterlife (2017), 62% of adults believe in the afterlife, with 17% not believing, leaving 20% as unsure. So most people, even though they are not sure why, have a pull to believe that there is life after death. And the gospel clarifies that point.

Jesus is proof of life after death. In the message of the gospel we learn that Jesus not only died for

the sins of all men, but He also came back from the grave as a testimony to the fact that there is an existence beyond the physical realm. The Bible testifies to the fact that not only did Jesus return and was seen by His disciples, but they were allowed to touch Jesus (John 20:27), lean upon Him (John 21:20), have conversations with Him, and learn further instruction on their mission going forward from Him (Acts 1:4-8).

So one aspect of the gospel, as seen in the resurrection of Christ, is that there is a hope, and it is a hope worth living for.

A hope worth living for. Now it is one thing to believe there is life after death, but another to have a hope for a better existence in the life to come. That is what the gospel of Christ does.

The gospel teaches us that God desires all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3). Therefore all have the same opportunity to spend eternity with Him in heaven. Now of course over the years the idea of eternal bliss in heaven and how it is obtained has become blurred. Most have this Hollywood idea in their heads that all people, unless they are the worst of the worst, will end up in heaven with the angels. But this is contrary to what the gospel actually teaches.

The gospel of Christ does teach that heaven is a reward available for all people, but what it **doesn't** teach is that it is a reward for the unrighteous.

[H]e who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. for the eyes of the lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:10-12).

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "IF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IS SCARCELY SAVED, WHERE WILL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:17-19).

Application. So while the gospel and only the gospel offers the comfort and benefit of eternal life, God's command is that we obey the gospel—not just at our baptism, but for the entirety of time on

earth as Christians. Anyone who has given their life to Christ, living with such dedication, will attest that such efforts are not in vain, but, rather, it is the only live worth living.

This brings us to the third part of what the gospel offers us a love to live with.

A Love to Live with.

A little love in our hearts. Like with the two previous points, a third aspect of human nature relies heavily on the concept of love. Love is a very important aspect of our physical lives, for it was something that we were given by our creator who first loved us. Before time began, He already knew how from one act of love the souls of humanity would be given a second chance to be saved.

The gospel is all about love. In John 3:16-17 we are told that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save the world. The gospel is about the act of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the teachings that He passed on to us through the Holy Spirit. And at the center of the gospel is love.

Jesus displayed for us the ultimate act of love. He willingly gave His life on that Roman cross so that we could be forgiven of our sins. Then God raised Jesus up from the grave to show how we too can be raised up from our sins and become something new in Christ. Being raised up as disciples of Christ, we were all given the same responsibility to share the good news of the gospel and the love of God to the world.

Christ our example. Those in Christ are charged to emulate Him and be the type of person He was—one full of mercy, patience, charity, and of course love. He said:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John 15:7-10).

And as we grow in relationship with God and move on from being babes in Christ to becoming mature, the teachings of the gospel guide us to better people and open the doors to the potential that this life can offer.

Application. Paul wrote:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God (2 Timothy 1:8).

The gospel teaches us to be better people, while instilling in us the truth of sharing a love worth living with.

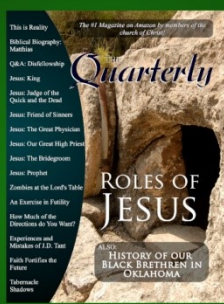
Conclusion:

The gospel of our Lord is an amazing testimony of God's love for humans. But as we have seen today it has also given us a faith and a hope worth living for, and a love to live with.

So the next time you are getting down or feeling a little blue, crack open the New Testament and read about our Lord, or take in some instruction from the many letters written by His disciples.

But never forget we have so much to be thankful for—and the gospel has more to offer us than we sometimes think!

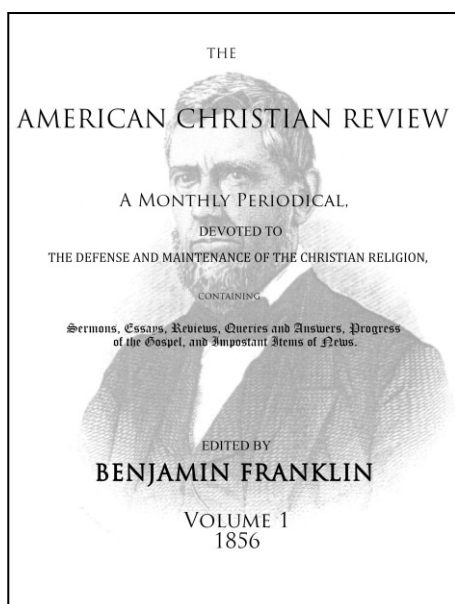
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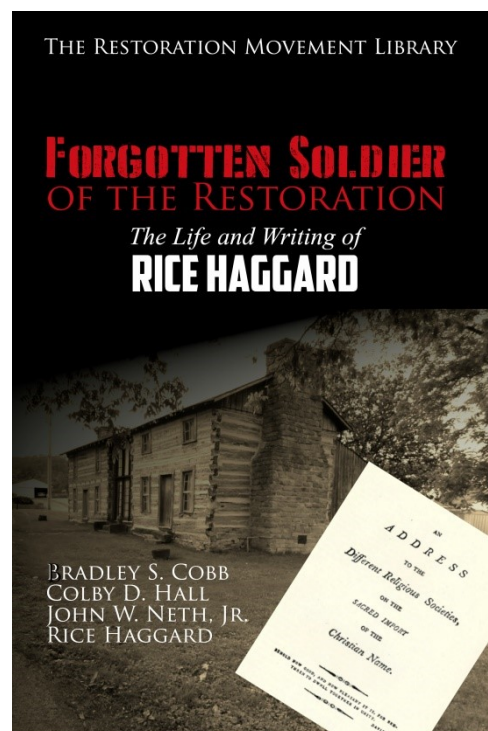
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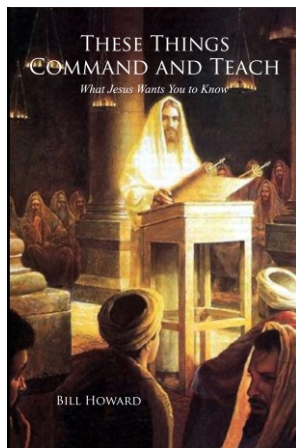
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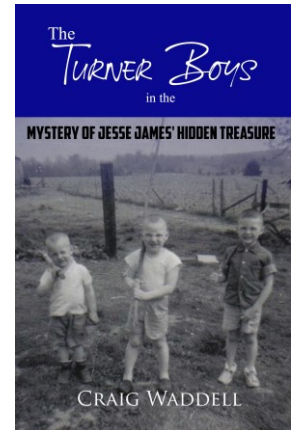
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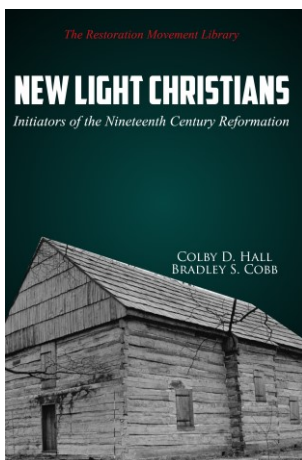
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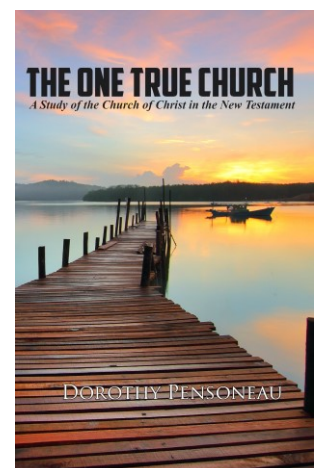
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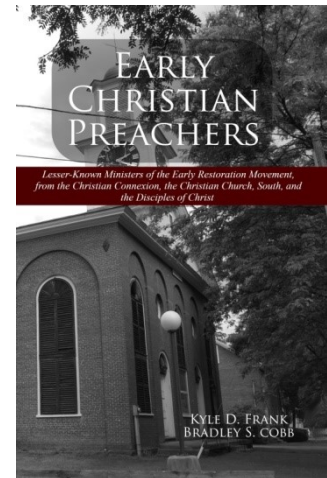


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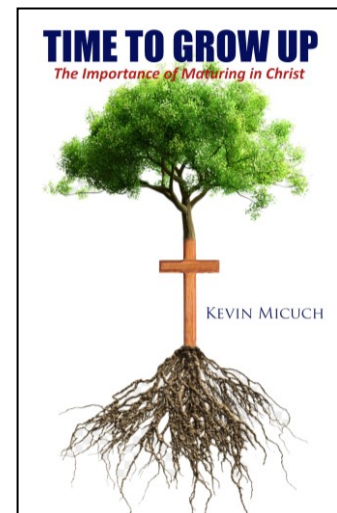
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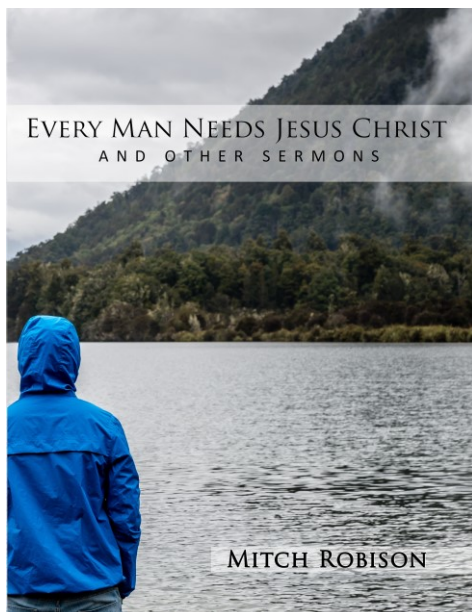
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PISTIS CHRISTOU

AND THE QUESTION OF THE FAITH OF CHRIST:

AN OVERVIEW

Paul Pollard, Ph.D.

Introduction

The Greek phrase *pistis christou* or its equivalent is found eight times in the Pauline letters: Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16 (twice), 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; and Phil. 3:9. From the grammatical point of view, the word *christou* can be interpreted as a subjective or objective genitive. What this means is that in the objective genitive *pistis* (faith) is directed to *christou* (Christ) and the translation would be “faith in Christ.” If it is a subjective genitive, faith (*pistis*) is that belonging to Christ and the translation would be “faith of Christ.”

All Greek grammarians agree that it is very difficult to decide between the objective and subjective genitive, and that in such cases the context must be the deciding factor. In other words, many would say that the key for deciding the meaning of *pistis christou* is entirely a matter of exegesis and not grammatical considerations.¹ More recently, some scholars are not willing to give up the grammatical side of the argument or to concede that it is strictly a matter of exegesis, and not linguistics or grammar. Accordingly, after a very technical linguistic evaluation of *pistis christou*, two experts in the field concluded that exegesis and theology must also be included in the analysis, and not just linguistics. However, strictly speaking from the linguistic side, they thought that *pistis christou* was an objective geni-

tive.²

Except for the King James Version, nearly all the translations after it translated the expression as “faith in Christ.” The only place where the King James Version does not translate *pistis christou* by the “faith of Christ” is in Rom. 3:26 where it has, “him which believeth in Jesus.” So, it is not entirely consistent.

Martin Luther seems to have understood the phrase as an objective genitive by translating it *Glaube an Christum*. As George Howard has noted, however, other translations in the general time period of Luther, such as the King James Version of 1611 and the old Spanish version of C. de Reine, revised by C. de Valera in 1602, preferred “the faith of Christ” for *pistis christou*.³ Howard also observed that the ancient translations such as the Latin Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta, Sahidic Coptic, and old Gothic apparently understood the construction as a subjective genitive.⁴

By way of summary up to this point, two main issues can be clearly seen. One is the question of whether the debate over *pistis christou* can be settled primarily by examination of the grammatical, linguistic issues, or by analysis of the context and arguments being made around the expression. The answer seems at this point to be that both are involved, but the grammatical side is not the dominant part of the equation.

¹ J. H. Moulton, *Prolegomena*, vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 72. G. B. Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. Revised, trans. W. F. Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882, 232 and more recently H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 118, n.45; F. Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 76; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 116, and many others.

² S. E. Porter and A. W. Pitts, “Pistis with A Preposition and Genitive Modifier: Lexical, Semantic, and Syntactic Considerations in the *Pistis Christou* Discussion,” 53; in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies*, eds. M. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009).

³ G. E. Howard, “Notes and Observations on the ‘Faith of Christ,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (October 1967) 461.

⁴ G. E. Howard, “The Faith of Christ,” *Expository Times* 85 (April 1974) 213.

The second point is that clearly a departure is made by Luther in translating the phrase “faith in Christ” when most of the ancient translations, and also the translations in and around his period, preferred “the faith of Christ.” It is certainly legitimate to raise the question of whether or not Luther’s contentious struggle against the legalism of the Roman Catholic Church pushed him not only to argue that salvation was by “faith alone” but that our faith, “faith in Christ,” was primary in obtaining salvation. Perhaps, “the faith of Christ” translation somehow detracted from his primary position.

Early Use of *Pistis Christou*

In terms of the *pistis christou* issue, several very early voices for the translation “the faith of Christ” began to be raised. For example, in 1795 James Macknight argued that the translation “the faith of Christ” was upheld by Phil. 3:9 and Rom. 4:16 where it was best to translate “the faith of Abraham” rather than “faith in Abraham.”⁵ J. P. Lange in 1869 also understood the phrase as a subjective genitive arguing that the righteousness of God in Paul’s epistles is revealed in the first instance by the faithfulness of Christ and not by our faith in Christ.⁶

The discussion of *pistis christou* arrived at a new point in 1891 when the German scholar Johannes Haussleiter made a sustained and rigorous argument for translating it as “the faith of Christ.” Central to his argument was that God’s righteousness is manifested by the faith of Christ, and not by man’s faith in Christ, and that grammatically the phrase “from the faith of Christ” in Rom. 3:26 is parallel to “from the faith of Abraham” in 4:16. For Haussleiter, Christ’s faith was his faith in God displayed in the garden as he faced death, and on the cross, that God would vindicate him.⁷

Various scholars reacted to Haussleiter’s thesis that *pistis christou* was to be understood as a subjective genitive, “faith of Christ,” but this is not the place to trace the responses pro and con. Clearly, a

flood of books and articles has appeared in the decades after Haussleiter and the main contours of the history of interpretation can easily be found.⁸

The Meaning of *Pistis*

One of the issues to emerge in the *pistis christou* discussion is the meaning of *pistis* (faith). Many of those holding to the subjective genitive, as I do, translate *pistis christou* by “the faith of Christ,” or the “faithfulness of Christ.” Logically, if a person has faith, that person is also faithful, but more than anything else, the context of the verses containing *pistis christou* help to define the meaning of *pistis*.

The counter argument is that context usually helps to narrow the semantic range of a word. Thus, the best way to understand whether “faith” or “faithfulness” is best is to look at places like Gal. 2:16 where, it is argued, the verb *pisteuo* defines the noun *pistis* (occurring in the same verse). Debbie Hunn argues that, “For the objective genitive view, faith is the only possible meaning of *pistis* in *pistis christou* phrases but, for the subjective genitive, either “faith” or “faithfulness” would make the phrase intelligible.”⁹ Furthermore, in every one of the eight passages that contain *pistis christou*, the phrases “the faith of Christ” or “the faithfulness of Christ” make good sense. If these phrases are used in those texts, the impression is not given of some twisted or concocted formula alien to Paul, but flow smoothly with the context.

The real bone of contention is whether the verb *pisteuo* defines the meaning of the noun *pistis*, and whether the phrase “to believe in Christ” is equivalent to *pistis christou* “the faith of Christ.” The standard response from the subjective genitive advocates is: why should a verb define the meaning of a noun? Linguistically it does not make sense that it should, and the objection is a solid one.

⁵ J. Macknight, *A New Literal Translation from the Original Greek of all the Apostolic Epistles* (London: Longman, Hurst, 1795) 194.

⁶ J. P. Lange and F. F. Fay, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, trans. J. F. Hurst and rev. P. Schaff and M. B. Riddle, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1869) 129.

⁷ J. Haussleiter, “Der Glaube Jesu Christi und der christliche Glaube,” *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 2 (1891) 109-45, 205-30; also see his article “Was versteht Paulus unter christlichen Glauben,” *Theologische Abhandlungen Hermann Cremer dargebracht* (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1895) 159-81.

⁸ J. P. Pollard, “The Problem of the Faith of Christ” (Ph.D. dissertation, Baylor University, 1982); J. P. Pollard, “The ‘Faith of Christ’ in Current Discussion,” *Concordia* 23 (1997) 213-28; D. Hunn, “Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ in Twentieth-Century Scholarship,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Bird and Sprinkle) 15-31.

⁹ Hunn, “Debating the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ,” 20. Promoters of the objective genitive position argue that *pistis* cannot mean both “faith” and “faithfulness,” and that the link between Rom. 3:26 and 4:16 where proponents of the subjective genitive find a parallel structure between *pistis christou* and *pistis Abraam* is not possible if “faithfulness” is used for *pistis*. (Hunn, 21).

Alternate Approaches to Pistis Christou

Since the debate over whether *pistis christou* is a subjective genitive or an objective genitive is somewhat reminiscent of trench warfare in World War I when neither side could make progress or overwhelm the opponent, some have suggested a third way. For example, Adolf Deissmann argued that Paul used the genitive “of Jesus Christ” in such a distinctive way that the usual categories of subjective genitive or objective genitive were insufficient. In their place he advocated a “mystical genitive” which indicates mystical fellowship with Christ.¹⁰ His view was that the believer’s faith was exercised “in Christ” and it was this relationship of spiritual union with Christ that Paul had in mind.¹¹

Typical of several scholars who like Deissmann thought that *pistis christou* was neither fish or fowl, not a subjective or objective genitive, is Nigel Turner. He said the construction could be either subjective, objective, or both. He issued the caveat that a genitive may have been in Paul’s mind that was subjective and objective at the same time, and that scholars should not sacrifice fullness of interpretation to an over precise analysis of syntax.¹² More recently, my professor, Morna Hooker has argued that the expression is both subjective and objective and, as she says, is a “concentric expression.”¹³ Hunn says about this approach that it means “in each occurrence of the phrase [*pistis christou*] we are to read of both Christians and Christ expressing *pistis* and to track these parallel meanings through the text as Paul continues his argument. Overloading a phrase with theology overloads the reader’s mind as well.”¹⁴

It may be helpful here to mention there is another line of interpretation of *pistis christou*, which like the previous one, does not advocate for either the subjective or objective genitive. Rather, it is typical

with this line of approach for interpreters to take the expression *pistis christou* as a singular expression, rather than focus on either *pistis* or *christou*. These would see *pistis christou* as something separate from a person’s response to God, but not totally unrelated to it. There are some variations in this approach: one thought is to see it (1) as the content of the gospel (the Christ-event); (2) as the preached gospel (the message of the Christ-event); or (3) as the sphere of salvation created by the gospel (i.e., the church).¹⁵ Normally in exegesis each word is accounted for, but this approach seems to overload the phrase with other meanings. Sprinkle himself wonders if Paul could have used *pistis christou* with the “kind of elasticity that the ‘third view’ (sometimes) suggests?”¹⁶

The ‘Faith of Christ’ Outside Paul’s Epistles

No Gospel writer clearly says that Jesus had faith, but there are indications in the Gospels that he did. At least five incidents in his ministry contain, at least implicitly, references to his faith: 1. The calming of the sea (Mk. 4:35-41 and parallels); 2. The healing of a boy with an unclean spirit (Mk. 9:14-29 and parallels); 3. The cursing of the fig tree (Mk. 11:12-14; 20-25 and parallels); 4. The prayer in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:32-42 and parallels); 5. The crucifixion (Mk. 15:33-41 and parallels). The reason it is important to look at these examples from the Gospels is that Paul knew the story of Jesus and this narrative substructure provides material that supports the subjective genitive in his epistles. Space forbids an extensive look at these texts, and only a few examples from them will be given.

The account of the calming of the sea in Mk. 4:35-41 is interesting for the light it casts on Jesus’ faith. The central focus of the story is the contrast of the faithlessness of the disciples over against Jesus’ divine authority to calm the waters. The disciples showed fear and lack of faith, while Jesus displayed perfect trust in God by falling asleep in the boat. The Old Testament frequently pictures sleep as a mark of total trust in God (cf. Lev. 26:6; Job 11:18-19; Ps. 3:5; 4:8, Prov. 3:23-24). Although Jesus’ faith is not specifically mentioned, it plays a large part in the episode.

In the narrative of the boy being healed of an un-

¹⁰ A. Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, 2nd ed, trans. W. E. Wilson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1923) 162.

¹¹ A. Deissmann, *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*, 2nd ed., trans. W. E. Wilson (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1923) 205-06.

¹² N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963) 211-12.

¹³ M. D. Hooker, “*PISTIS CHRISTOU*,” in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; first published in NTS 35 (1989) :321-42) 184. Although arguing for the phrase to be both subjective and objective, Hooker leans much more toward the subjective.

¹⁴ Hunn, “Debating the Faithfulness of Christ,” 25.

¹⁵ P. M. Sprinkle, “*Pistis Christou* as an Eschatological Event,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Bird and Sprinkle) 175.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

clean spirit in Mk. 9:14-29, it is clear the disciples fail because of their lack of faith and Jesus, by implication, heals the boy because of his faith. This is certainly suggested by the parallel in Mt. 17:19 when the disciples ask why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus answered that they failed because of their “little faith.” Since he, in fact, did cast the demon out, it must have been because he had what they lacked.

One of the differences in Mark’s and Matthew’s account of the crucifixion is the statement in Mt. 27:43 about Jesus from the religious leaders that “he had trusted in God.” These words in the climax of the Gospel from the lips of Jesus’ opponents provide a good summary statement “about the character of Jesus’ entire life.”¹⁷ It was obvious, that the way Jesus lived indicated the object of his faith and trust to be God. The case for Jesus having faith would be stronger if *pistis* had been used instead of *peitho* (trust). However, *peitho* can function, like *pistis*, as a sign of one’s dependence on God, and the clear implication of the statement by the religious leaders is that Jesus had his life grounded on God in faith.

Numerous verses in the New Testament contain expressions very similar to *pistis christou* taken as a subjective genitive. Texts such as Acts 3:16; Heb. 12:2; Jas. 2:1; Rev. 2:13; 14:12 are important for this phase of the discussion. Some are more persuasive than others.

Acts 3:16 has many unresolved difficulties, and while offering some support for the subjective genitive, is not conclusive. However, strong support for the idea of Christ’s faith comes from Heb. 12:2. In this epistle, the humanity of Christ has its greatest emphasis, and with it, indications of his faith. If Jesus is a real person, a real human, subject to all the temptations we face, why cannot Jesus also possess faith as other humans do? The stress on Jesus’ obedience, and the strong resonance of obedience with faith found in other places in the New Testament, is also important in Hebrews.

Jas. 2:1 is enigmatic from several angles, but the

God’s righteousness is established, demonstrated, and explicated by what Christ did by going to the cross, and by having faith that God would raise him from the dead.

possibility that the author is speaking about Christ’s faith is a viable option in the context. James’ point may be that those who hold to faith, based on the faith that Jesus had, could not, without sinning, discriminate against the poor.

The notion that Christ’s faith is in view in Rev. 2:13 receives strong support from the context. What better model for a people undergoing severe persecution could be found than the proto-martyr Christ? What better example of faithfulness in the face of adversity could be found than Christ’s own faithfulness? Several times in Revelation Christ is called “faithful,” (*pistos*). As in 2:13, the endurance of the saints in 14:12 is encouraged by the fact of Christ’s own faithful sufferings.

Implications of the “Faith of Christ” Interpretation

Paul makes it abundantly clear in Rom. 3:10-18 that no one is righteous. Furthermore, in 3:19-26 we see some of the central implications of *pistis christou*.

Paul apparently uses Psalm 143 in 3:20 to sum up his argument that no one is justified before God. Just as 3:10-18 shows the total inadequacy of human beings to stand before God, the same general idea is found in Psalm 143. In 3:21 the point is that God has not revealed his righteousness by means of the law, but in another way. Just as humans fail in attaining righteousness by

their own virtue, the law also fails in making it possible.

Since nothing in humans promote righteousness, and the law could not produce it, where do we turn? Paul’s answer is found in 3:22. As we see it, the righteousness of God is revealed by translating *dia pisteos Iesou Christou* as subjective genitive “through the faith of Jesus Christ.”

The main emphasis of 3:21-26 is how God’s righteousness is demonstrated, and for Paul it is by the saving sacrifice of Christ. This is indicated by the following: 1. The evidence of 3:3-5a and from 3:10-18 is that God’s righteousness has not been revealed by man, for as 3:10 says, “there is no one righteous, not even one;” 2. For Paul, the only one capable of initially revealing God’s righteousness is

¹⁷ P. G. Bolt, “The Faith of Jesus Christ in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts,” in *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Bird and Sprinkle) 216.

the one who is righteous (*dikaios*) himself and that is Jesus the Messiah; 3. In no passage does Paul state that man's faith is that which originally showed God to be righteous—rather by faith men must submit to the righteousness of God previously demonstrated by the obedient life and death of Christ; 4. In 3:22 the believer's participation, in the already existent righteousness of God, is pointed to by the phrase “unto all who believe.”

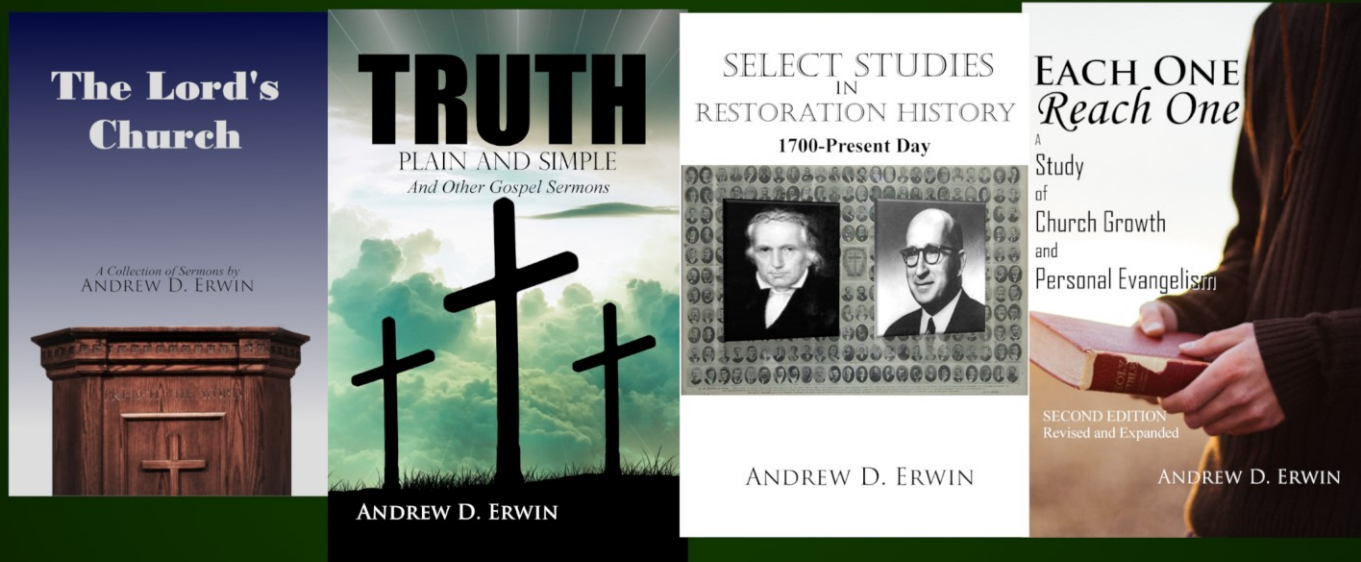
Thus, the believer's faith only in a “secondary” sense demonstrates God's righteousness, but this in no way weakens or eliminates man's role or negates the Pauline emphasis on justification by faith.

When it is seen in Rom. 3:21-26 that the primary topic under discussion is God's righteousness, and not man's, then the traditional objective genitive translation “through faith in Christ” makes little sense. To argue that God's righteousness is established by whether man does, or does not believe, is

to undercut the sovereignty of God. In 3:3-4 the point is that God's righteousness is not affected by what humans do, or do not do. Rather, God's righteousness is established, demonstrated, and explicated by what Christ did by going to the cross, and by having faith that God would raise him from the dead.

What Romans 3 (and other texts) also shows is that the focus on the extreme individualism that developed from the Protestant Reformation, where my personal “faith in Christ” carries all the weight, is blunted by *pistis christou* meaning Christ's faith. We learn that what is most important for salvation is not what I do, but what Christ has already done in making my salvation possible by his faith and obedience. Our response, to what Christ made possible, is to respond in faith. His faith makes my faith possible, and the phrase *pistis christou* signifies this dynamic.

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GOD IS LARGE AND IN CHARGE

Jake Schotter

The book of Exodus is a familiar story to us. We remember the book began with the Israelites in bondage because there was *a large amount* of them living in Egypt (Exodus 1:7) and the Pharaoh was *afraid* of the potential power they had if they started an uprising (Exodus 1:9-10). All of this stemmed from *not having an awareness* of who Joseph was, what he did, and how much he was respected (Exodus 1:8; Genesis 41:38-49).

What followed was a period of 430 years of suffering (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40-41; Acts 7:6; Galatians 3:16-17), sometimes rounded to 400 years. It was not until God called Moses from the Burning Bush (Exodus 3 and 4) that deliverance was on its way.

Before this ever happened, it was first prophesied to Abram in Genesis 15:13. This verse reads, “God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.’” As we analyze this verse, we are able to note five clear elements of God’s timetable at work.

An Analysis

First, we see the *certainty* of what was going to happen (“know for certain”). God is omniscient – if He says something is going to happen, it is a settled matter. The phrase, “God said it, I believe it, that settles it!” is a misstatement. We do not need to believe or disbelieve something God says for it to be true or to happen. In the light of this statement, we have no influence over what God has decreed – it will happen. Consider Amos 3:7 and 1 John 5:20.

Second, we observe the *children* this is going to happen to (“your descendants”). Abraham, according to Genesis 15:15, will be exempted before this takes place. The Lord keeps His promise and Abraham does not see them go into bondage or experience it himself.

Third, we recognize the *condition* Abraham’s descendants find themselves in. They “will be

strangers in a land that is not theirs.” The descendants of Abraham will be able to identify with the forefather because he was a “stranger” as well (Genesis 23:4; 12:10-11; chapter 20). We know that the land of Egypt is not Israel’s, but we must recognize how much had changed between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus to where Joseph was not even known by the Pharaoh! An even starker image is given when we remember Joseph was second in command over all of Egypt – he was a powerful man (Genesis 41:38-46) who ruled for 80 years (Genesis 41:46; 50:22, 26)!

The next thing we read about is a description of the *circumstances* they will face while in Egypt (“where they will be enslaved and oppressed”). These very things were fulfilled (Exodus 1:11-14). But, as we read in verse 14 of Genesis 15, they have to experience hardship before they can exit prosperously. Arthur W. Pink wrote:

“A profound truth is here taught us... Abram now learns that the inheritance can be reached only through suffering! His heirs would have to pass through the furnace before they entered into that which God had prepared for them” (Pink 169).

The final element we observe is the *chronology* of their stay in Egypt (“four hundred years”). Multitudes of commentators have noted that the Bible provides us with two groups of numbers: 400 (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6) and 430 (Exodus 12:41; Galatians 3:17). The overwhelming majority of these writers agree that this is a simple matter of rounding.

Some Application Points

Now that we have analyzed the text, we can properly apply this verse to us today. What lessons can we learn about God from this passage?

First, *God’s will* will happen no matter what we think should or should not happen. It is probably safe to say that people do not want their children,

grand-children, or any other family member to go through difficult times, let alone slavery and oppression. How can a good God do this? Perhaps this suggests the second application. Suffice to say, when God says something will happen, it will happen. We must trust God because He does not lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

Second, *God works*, sometimes even in mysterious ways that we do not understand. Recognizing the providence of God is more a rear-view window activity – it would be very tough for us to decide in the moment (i.e. Israelites in slavery; c.f. Exodus 5:22-23) if something was God's will and Him allowing it to happen was really His work. Granted, we know that this was the case with Abraham's descendants, because we can see the rest of the story. There was a purpose, and it is a wonderful demonstration of the scheme of redemption.

Third, *God waits*. The reason for having the Israelites in Egyptian bondage for 400 years is not known to us. Seeing this through the lens of the

scheme of redemption, we see that God waits on us to be completely dependent on Him. Isaiah wrote:

"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9-10; c.f. 55:8-9).

Phillips Brooks was once asked why he was so agitated; he responded, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't."

As we remember God's providence, promises, and perspective, we are able to go through difficult times with confidence that "God is large and in charge!" Whether we are enslaved to Egypt or in bondage to sin, we must remember God has the power to deliver.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Michael Shank

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape,

and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Fi-

nally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "**Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you.**"

Do you think encouragement is important?

Acts 4:36—Joses, who the apostles nicknamed Barnabas, was an encourager. In fact, Barnabas means "son of consolation" or "son of *encouragement*." The mere fact that the Word names Barnabas shows the importance of something; it reveals the importance of encouragement.

How can we encourage one another like Barnabas?

BY EXAMPLE

The first thing we can do is to learn to be an example. If you read the verse right behind Acts 4:36, 37 says, "Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Barnabas sold the land that he owned and gave it to the church.

Do you think that was encouraging to members of the church who witnessed that act? Do you think Barnabas' action of giving that money was encouraging to all of those who were in dire need of assistance?

BY A MORE ACTIVE FAITH

We can learn to become encouragers by living a more active faith.

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification (Rom. 15:1-2).

When you become active, when you get out and actually do something for someone else, how does it make you feel? Isn't it a strengthening experience for you as well?

WITH WORDS

We can become more encouraging with the words that we use. What do we say to one another continually? Keep on, keep it up, keep doing what you're doing.

They exhorted them to continue in the faith (Acts 14:22).

They encouraged by letter and by speech,

Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them (Acts 15:31-32).

We ought to remember to encourage one another with the promises. You know, I don't hear us do this very much. Paul said:

*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore **comfort one another** with these words.*

WITH PRESENCE

And we become much more encouraging with our own presence, don't we?

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ (Col. 2:1-2).

Paul knew that he needed to see them face to face, in the flesh, so that they might be comforted; encouraged. There is psychological strength in numbers – it has a powerful effect on the mind and heart;

CONCLUSION

Is it important to become a better personal encourager? If your answer is yes, then how can you become a better personal encourager for Jesus Christ?

- With an example,
- With a more active faith of service,
- By making a conscious decision to use words of encouragement
- And with your presence.

John the Apostle

Bradley S. Cobb

Like his brother James, John was a son of Zebedee and a first-cousin of Jesus Christ.¹ It is perhaps because of a close family relationship that John identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”² in his account of the gospel.

John as a Disciple

There is no clear, definitive evidence showing when John first began to follow the Lord. But it is very possible that we see it in John 1:

The next day after, John [the immerser] stood, and two of his disciples; and looking on Jesus as He walked, he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following, and says to them, “What are you seeking?” They say to Him, “Rabbi,” (which is to say, being interpreted, “Master”) “where are you staying?” He says to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where He was staying, and stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John [the immerser] and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.³

Apparently out of humility, the apostle John never once mentions himself by name in his gospel account. With one exception, he always refers to him-

self in this book as a “disciple.”⁴ So it should come as no surprise if this nameless disciple, who was among the very first to follow Jesus, was in fact the apostle John.⁵

Assuming this to be the case, it is possible that John then went and found his brother James and brought him to Jesus as well.⁶ Then, John would have been present with his cousin Jesus and his aunt Mary at the marriage in Cana,⁷ and would have traveled with his cousins to Capernaum afterwards,⁸ then to Jerusalem where Jesus cast out the money-changers,⁹ and into Judea where John would have

⁴ The only time where John uses a different descriptive term to identify himself is found in John 21:2, where he refers to himself and his brother by the term “the sons of Zebedee.” And even in there, he refers to himself as one of the “disciples” (see the previous verse).

⁵ Hovey says: “But who was the unnamed companion of Andrew? Probably the Evangelist himself. For: (1) the narrative in this place is very particular and graphic, making it probable that the writer was an eye-witness. (2) The writer of such a narrative would have been sure to mention the name of the other disciple, unless there had been some reason for withholding it. (3) The writer of this Gospel never refers to himself by name, and the same feeling which led him to withhold his name elsewhere accounts for his withholding it here.” (Alvah Hovey, *Commentary on John*, p. 78). It is the details, even down to the exact time (the tenth hour, aka 4pm) that makes this even more likely. Such is also the suggestion of Barclay, Albert Barnes, B.W. Johnson, Clarke, Coke, Dummelow, Dake, Gill, Rhoderick Ice, Lange, McGarvey, Robertson, and Vincent (among others).

⁶ Some have argued that John 1:41, which says that Andrew *first* went to find his brother Simon, indicates that the other disciple (likely John) *also* went to find his brother.

⁷ John 2:1-2.

⁸ John 2:11-12.

⁹ John 2:13-23.

¹ This fact would also mean that he was the first cousin of James (the Lord’s brother) and Jude. See the previous chapter for how this relationship is taught in the Scriptures.

² This statement is found in John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20.

³ John 1:35-40.

helped in baptizing people.¹⁰ Upon returning to Galilee, John apparently went back to his fishing business along with his brother James and their friends Peter and Andrew.

It was back in Capernaum some time later that John and his brother saw Jesus in the synagogue, teaching with authority and casting out a demon. Afterwards, he accompanied Jesus to Andrew and Peter's house, where Peter's mother-in-law was sick. After Jesus healed her, John almost certainly engaged in religious discussion with Jesus (as would Peter, Andrew, and James as well). Some time later, John was with James, working on their fishing nets, when Jesus began to teach by the Lake of Gennesaret.¹¹ Jesus got in Simon's ship and after teaching, told Peter to let down his net; the net became so full of fish that Peter called for John and James to come help bring in the catch. It is after this that Jesus called both John and James to follow Him, which they did, leaving their father Zebedee with the hired servants in the ship.¹²

John as an Apostle

One morning, John and the rest of the disciples of Jesus were called to go up a mountain where Jesus had been praying all night. John must have been excited by being selected as one of just twelve men that would be representatives for the miracle-working man that he believed to be the Messiah. John then followed his cousin down the mountain, where he saw a crowd of people waiting—and Jesus

healed the sick and diseased among them.¹³

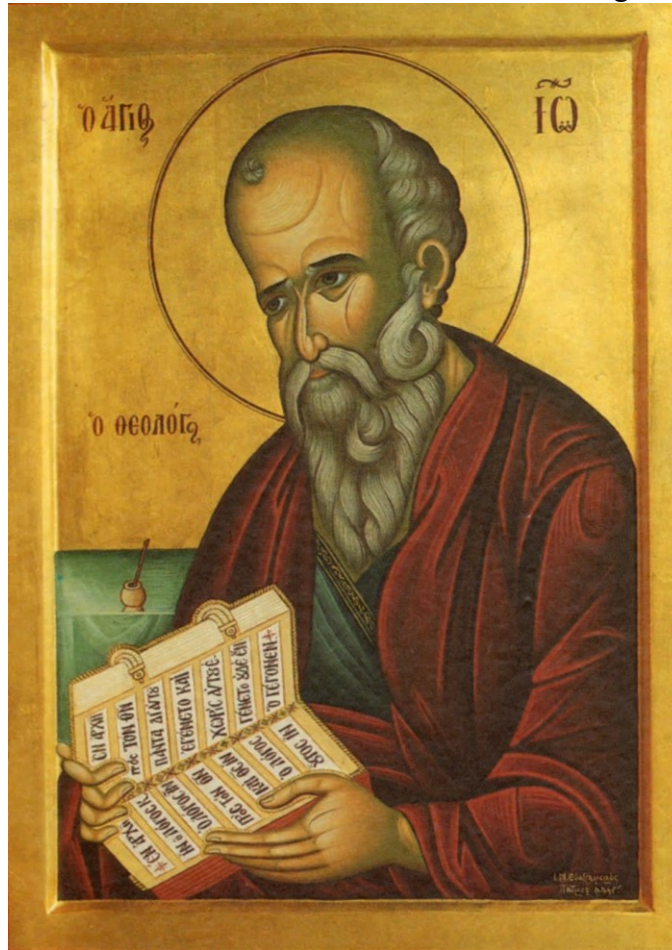
After preaching in Decapolis, on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum¹⁴ and was approached by the ruler of the synagogue, Jairus,¹⁵ concerning his daughter who was near to

death. John was one of just three disciples of Jesus who was selected to accompany the Lord inside the house to see this little girl raised from the dead.¹⁶

Later on, John was taken by Jesus, along with Peter and James, to a mountain where Jesus prayed. John fell asleep, but when he awoke, the sight before him was quite a shock: Jesus was positively shining, and standing with Him were Moses and Elijah. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and they heard God Himself speak, "This is my beloved Son: hear Him." And then John looked, and the two Old Testament figures had disappeared, leaving only

Jesus. A mixture of fear and excitement was boiling inside John, but Jesus told them not to say anything about what they had seen until after He was risen from the dead.¹⁷

Upon returning to Capernaum, John and the other disciples argued about who was the greatest among them. Jesus criticized them all, and said, "If any man desires to be first, he shall be last of all and



¹⁰ John 3:22, compare with 4:1-2.

¹¹ This is another name for the Sea of Galilee, which John himself calls the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1). See James Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ in the Gospels*, "Galilee, Sea of."

¹² This information is found in Luke 5:1-11 and Mark 1:16-20.

¹³ Luke 6:12-19.

¹⁴ Matthew places this incident with others which took place in Capernaum. See Matthew 9:1 ("His own city"), 9:9-17 (the call of Matthew, followed by the feast at Matthew's house), after which Matthew says "While He spoke these things to them, behold, a certain ruler [Jairus] came to Him..." Mark places these events in Capernaum (Mark 2:1-22).

¹⁵ This Jairus, being the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, would have been on hand to see Jesus casting out the demon, as recorded in Luke 4:31-37.

¹⁶ Luke 8:51-55.

¹⁷ Luke 9:28-36, Mark 9:8-9.

servant of all.”¹⁸ This is a lesson that John apparently didn’t learn the first time, because not too long afterwards, he and his brother James had their mother ask Jesus for the two greatest seats in the kingdom, causing Jesus to say almost the exact same words: “Whoever shall be great among you shall be your servant; and whoever of you desires to be the first shall be servant of all.”¹⁹

In between these two events, John tells Jesus a story about how, when the apostles were out and about, they saw someone who wasn’t part of their group casting out demons in Jesus’ name. John and some others went to the man and told him to cease, because he wasn’t following them. To this, Jesus replied, “Don’t forbid him, for there is no man who shall do a miracle in my name that can speak evil lightly of me. For he that is not against us is on our side.”²⁰ John learned an important lesson there—don’t forbid people from doing good.

But what happens when people are staunchly rejecting Jesus? John didn’t just want to *forbid* them, he wanted to *kill* them!

It came to pass, when the time was come that [Jesus] should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. And He sent messengers before His face: and they went

¹⁸ Mark 9:33-35.

¹⁹ Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-44, especially verses 43-44. The KJV says “chiefest,” but the Greek is the same as in 9:35 and 10:44.

²⁰ Mark 9:38-40. Neither Mark nor Luke (the only other gospel writer who mentions this event) tell us who this man casting out demons in Jesus’ name was. Some (Lange, Lightfoot, and others) have suggested that this man was a disciple of John the Immerser who cast out demons by the name of the “Messiah” which he expected to come, not necessarily doing it in the name of “Jesus”—but there is no evidence that any of John’s disciples were able to perform miracles. Others (Calvin, most notably) take the ridiculous stance that this man “proceeded inconsiderately to work miracles.” Clarke suggests that this man might have been one of the seventy who had been given miraculous abilities, yet who decided to not be part of the mass of disciples after returning from his mission—except that this event took place before Christ chose the seventy (see Luke 9:49-10:1).

What is important to note is that John doesn’t say the man was *trying* to cast out demons (like the sons of Sceva in Acts 19), but that he was actually *doing* it. Jesus even acknowledges that this man was actually working miracles by saying “Don’t forbid him [from casting out demons].” Thus this man had been given miraculous power by God (probably via Christ), because he was a true disciple of the Lord, even though for whatever reason, he was unable to devote all of his time to following Jesus on His preaching tours.

*and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make [things] ready for Him. And they didn’t receive Him because His face was as though He desired to go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples, James and John, saw, they said, “Lord, do you desire that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” And they went to another village.*²¹

Jesus and His disciples came to the Jerusalem area, and stayed at the house of Lazarus on the Sabbath.²² On the next day, John witnessed the “triumphal entry,”²³ where Jesus entered the city riding the colt of an ass, and heard the people crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!”²⁴ Then John followed Jesus to the temple, where the Lord taught the people, after which they returned to Bethany (probably to the house of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha).²⁵ On Monday, John followed Jesus back into Jerusalem. Along the way, they saw a fig tree, and Jesus desired to eat some of the fruits from it. However, there was nothing but leaves on the tree, and John heard Jesus utter the words “Let no fruit grow on you, henceforward forever!”²⁶ After they came into Jerusalem, and into the temple, John watched:

²¹ Luke 9:51-56. The first-rate chronological historian gives no record of events between John’s misplaced zeal for forbidding those who believed in Jesus and his desire to destroy the ones who rejected Him. It’s as though John was saying, “Jesus, I get that we aren’t supposed to forbid those who are doing good, but *surely* you can’t have a problem with us wiping out those who are refusing to help you at all!” What John didn’t understand at that point was the patience of the Lord, and that the Lord Himself will take care of punishing the wicked at judgment.

²² John 12:1-13, with special emphasis on the first and last verse of that section.

²³ It is never called that in Scriptures, but it is the commonly accepted name for what took place on the Sunday prior to Jesus’ crucifixion.

²⁴ Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38 (Luke says “Blessed is the King...”). This is a quotation of Psalm 118:26. Most likely, the Jews who were saying this would have quoted the verse as it is written, which is “Blessed is he that comes in the name of Jehovah!”

²⁵ Mark 11:11, Luke 19:47. Mark provides some specifics on the passage of days during this week (see Mark 11:12).

²⁶ Mark 11:12-14; Matthew 21:19. Mark adds the detail that it wasn’t time for figs yet (verse 13).

*Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and He would not allow that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called by all nations The House of Prayer'? But you have made it a den of thieves!"*²⁷

That evening, John accompanied Jesus out of Jerusalem for the night.²⁸

On Tuesday, John again accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem, and they passed the same tree they had the day before. Except this time, the tree was dried up from the roots—completely withered—after which Jesus spoke about the power of faith. They then entered the city and went into the temple, where a group of scribes, elders, and chief priests confronted Jesus and demanded to know where He got His authority to do these things. John must have smiled to himself when he heard Jesus reply by asking them where John's authority to baptize came from—and saw the Jewish leaders feign ignorance.²⁹

Then, John heard Jesus give a parable, condemning the Jewish leaders—and they knew it was directed at them—for rejecting Him.³⁰ Then he saw Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees all working together, taking turns trying to trap Jesus.³¹ As they were leaving the temple, one of the disciples (we're not told which one) said to Jesus, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings!" To this, Jesus replied, "You see these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone on another, that shall not be thrown down."³²

It was because of this statement of Jesus that John approached Jesus with Peter, Andrew, and

James, and asked Jesus to "Tell us when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"³³ In answer to those questions, Jesus told these four men about the signs to look for, including "when you shall see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near."³⁴ This he did, foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem—which took place 40 years later in AD 70.³⁵

Wednesday evening,³⁶ Jesus came with John and the rest of the apostles to a large upper room that was prepared for them to eat the Passover.³⁷ Earlier, Jesus had specifically selected Peter and John, sent them from Bethany into Jerusalem so that this room could be made ready.

Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He [Jesus] sent Peter and John, saying "Go and prepare us the Passover, so that we may eat." And they said to Him, "Where do you wish that we prepare it?"

And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered into the city, a man will meet you there, carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the goodman of the house, 'The Master says to you, "Where is the guest-chamber where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?"' And he will show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready."

*And they went, and found [everything] as He had said to them: and they made ready the Passover.*³⁸

Based on the command of Jesus and John and Peter's obedience, it appears that these two disciples

²⁷ Mark 11:15-17. This was a significant event which emboldened the scribes and chief priests to even more want Jesus dead (Mark 11:18).

²⁸ Mark 11:19.

²⁹ Mark 11:20-33; Luke 20:1-8.

³⁰ The fullest account of this exchange between Jesus and the Jewish leadership is found in Matthew 21:33-46.

³¹ Mark 12:13-27. This is astounding, because these are (for lack of a better term) different political parties within Judaism. They were violently opposed to each other (see Acts 23, for example), but they all recognized that Jesus was a danger to their positions of power.

³² Mark 13:1-2, Matthew 24:1-2, Luke 21:5-6.

³³ Mark 12:3-4 is the only place that tells us that this question was asked by just these four men.

³⁴ Luke 21:20. Matthew calls it "the abomination of desolation" which Daniel foretold, meaning that Jesus described something that had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

³⁵ There are disagreements about the exact year of Jesus' death, but biblically and historically speaking, it is most likely AD 30, which makes Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 forty years away.

³⁶ For the Jews, the new day of the week began at 6pm, because of Genesis 1, which says "the evening and the morning were the first day." So Thursday evening to them, because it began a new day, is what we would refer to as Wednesday evening.

³⁷ Mark 14:12-17.

³⁸ Luke 22:7-13.

actually did the killing and cooking of the lamb in preparation for what is usually called “The Last Supper.”

When they were all gathered together in the upper room, Jesus said, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”³⁹ It was during this occasion that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, followed by announcing that one of the twelve was going to betray Him.⁴⁰ The apostles all began to ask, “is it I?”⁴¹

*Now there was, leaning on Jesus’ bosom, one of His disciples [John], whom Jesus loved. Therefore, Simon Peter motioned to him, so that he should ask who it would be about whom He spoke. He, then, lying on Jesus’ chest, says to Him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.” And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.*⁴²

Then, the same old argument came up again about which one would be greatest among them. It is possible that James and John had learned their lesson by this point and kept their mouth shut, but it’s also possible that their ego took over again.⁴³ And like before, Jesus had to teach them the lesson about being a servant.⁴⁴ Yet just hours after they were arguing about who would be the greatest, they all (even John) ran away and forsook Jesus.⁴⁵

Before abandoning Jesus, however, John was taken by Jesus with Peter and James in order to

“watch” while He prayed.⁴⁶ But John, like the other two, fell asleep. After being awakened by the Lord, John again went to sleep shortly after the Lord left to go pray a second time. The next time John woke up, Judas was arriving with a band of soldiers.⁴⁷

After abandoning Jesus, John regained his composure, and caught up with His Lord, and accompanied Him to the high priest, Annas. The high priest knew John, which many have taken as evidence that John’s family was wealthy, and so this disciple was permitted to enter into the court with Jesus to view the proceedings. He watched as Jesus was interrogated and brutalized during this mock trial.⁴⁸

Whether John followed Jesus to his other trials that morning isn’t stated, but he stood at the cross, looking up at His Master who was hanging, bleeding, and beaten. He heard the Lord say to His mother Mary, “Woman, behold your son!” Then John heard Jesus speak directly to him, “Behold, your mother!” And from that moment, John took care of her.⁴⁹

John after the Resurrection

John stayed at the cross until after Jesus had died, and witnessed first-hand the soldier shoving a spear into the side of Jesus. He watched as the blood and water came flowing from the wound, and it made an indelible impression on him. Years later, when he wrote his account of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he made sure to include this information, and even stressed that he was there to see it firsthand.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Mark 14:32-34.

⁴⁷ Matthew 26:36-47.

⁴⁸ John 18:15-22. Verse 15 specifically says that John “went in with Jesus.”

⁴⁹ John 19:26-27. Some have questioned why it is that Jesus would ask John to take care of his mother instead of asking His own brothers. First, it is most likely that Joseph was no longer alive at this point (otherwise Jesus would be asking His mother to leave her husband, which is ridiculous). Second, John wasn’t a stranger—he was Mary’s nephew, so John is still family. Third, at this point, the brothers of Jesus were not believers, and perhaps Jesus didn’t want to subject His mother to staying with non-believers. Fourth, John was apparently wealthy—the family fishing business was large enough to employ servants, and John was on friendly terms with the high priest (which couldn’t be said of many—if any—poor people). We don’t know that the Jesus’ brothers were financially able to care for their mother.

⁵⁰ John 19:30-35. John does not emphasize his status as an eyewitness for any other specific event his gospel account. This shows that the blood and water coming from Christ has a major significance. See Romans 6:3-5; Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5, 7:14.

³⁹ Luke 22:15. This is another way of saying, “I have desired very much...”

⁴⁰ Some have argued, based on Matthew and Mark’s accounts (juxtaposed with John’s) that Judas left prior to the institution of the Lord’s Supper. However, Luke (who claimed to write chronologically) places the announcement of betrayal (“the hand of him that betrays me is with me on the table”) after the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:14-22).

⁴¹ Mark 14:18.

⁴² John 13:23-26. It seems strange that though Jesus positively identified Judas as the betrayer, none of the other apostles seemed to catch what He was saying. Judas had them all fooled.

⁴³ Luke 22:24. It’s interesting that this should come right on the heels of Jesus announcing that one of them would betray Him. It may be that they went from saying, “Is it I?” to “It couldn’t be me,” to “I **know** it couldn’t be me, because I’m the most devoted follower Jesus has.”

⁴⁴ Luke 22:25-30.

⁴⁵ Matthew 26:56.

After the death of Jesus, John was quite sad and upset. He still didn't understand the Scriptures, that Jesus would rise from the dead.⁵¹ But the next morning, Mary Magdalene, along with Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James,⁵² came running to him and the other apostles, most likely with tears and confusion, saying, "They've taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we don't know where they've laid him." They also said that they had seen men in shining clothes who told them that Jesus had risen. But the apostles thought they were making things up and didn't believe them.⁵³

However, John and Peter took off running immediately for the tomb where Jesus had been laid. John was the faster of the two men, and beat Peter there. Then, while waiting for Peter to get there, John bent down and looked inside. There he saw the linen burial clothes laying inside the rock tomb, but he didn't enter. Then, Peter finally arrived and went straight in the place where Jesus' body had been placed a few days earlier. John followed Peter in, and saw again the burial clothes laying there, and also noticed that the face cloth was laying by itself, "rolled



up" (ASV) together. Seeing this was enough to make John believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, even though he didn't understand yet that it was what the Scriptures had foretold.⁵⁴ Coffman has some interesting comments at this point:

Commentators who refer this to some mere tidying up of the grave, or the folding of the garments (there were no garments; but medical bandages), miss the point. Since when has it ever been supposed that a folded garment, or cloth, proved that the dead had arisen? The certain

implication of this astounding narration is that Jesus had risen *through* the winding shroud of bandages, napkin and all, leaving behind the positive and undeniable evidence of his supernatural triumph over death. Remember, this evidence convinced John. The very amount of space accorded this phenomenon in this Gospel is far more than enough to indicate the extraordinary implications of "the linen cloths lying." Matthew has a remarkable corroboration of this account in the words of the angel, "Come see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 26:6), thus emphatically implying all that John here related.

...The napkin around the head would not have connected with the winding shroud; and that independent placement was preserved in the manner of the linen cloths lying.⁵⁵

Barclay agrees:

Then something else struck him—the grave-clothes were not disheveled and disarranged. They were lying there still in their folds—that is what the Greek means—the clothes for the body where the body had been; the napkin where the head had lain. The whole point of the description is that the grave-clothes did not look as if they had been put off or taken off; they were lying there in their regular folds as if

⁵¹ John 20:9.

⁵² Luke 24:10. Most likely, this is Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Since they had not yet seen Jesus Himself raised, she would have been called by the name of her oldest *known* living son, which was James. Luke has a general habit of not mentioning someone by name unless he expected the reader to already know who that person was, or unless that person showed up elsewhere in his writings. Joanna was mentioned in Luke 8:3, Mary Magdalene in 8:2. Other than Mary Magdalene, Luke mentions two women named Mary: Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (and his brothers, including James). Since it was already common knowledge (thanks to Matthew's gospel which was published and distributed around 20 years earlier) that James was the brother of Jesus and the son of Mary, Luke could identify the mother of Jesus as "Mary, the mother of James," and the readers would have known exactly what he meant by it.

⁵³ John 20:1-2 only mentions Mary Magdalene speaking to John and Peter, but she says "we don't know where they've laid Him." Luke 24:10-11 mentions two other women by name, and includes "others." It is possible that the women split up in order to get the news spread to the apostles quickly.

⁵⁴ John 20:1-9.

⁵⁵ James Burton Coffman, comments on John 20:6-7.

the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them. The sight suddenly penetrated to John's mind; he realized what had happened—and he believed. It was not what he had read in scripture which convinced him that Jesus had risen; it was what he saw with his own eyes.⁵⁶

That evening, word had spread that Peter had seen the Lord,⁵⁷ and John gathered together with all the apostles (except for Thomas, who was absent).⁵⁸ They kept the doors shut, in fear that the Jewish leaders might come after them—especially now that whispers were spreading that the tomb was found empty, and people were claiming to have seen Jesus very much alive.⁵⁹ While they were gathered together, Jesus appeared in their midst, and said “Peace to you,” and showed them His hands and His side, proving that it was Him. Joy cannot begin to describe the feeling that John was experiencing. But at the same time, Jesus upbraided them because they hadn't believed the ones who had told them that He had been raised.⁶⁰

Some time afterwards, John accompanied Peter and some of the other apostles onto a boat where they went fishing all night, but caught nothing. The next morning, John saw a man on the shore, who called out to them, “Children, do you have any food?” After they replied in the negative, John heard the man say, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you'll find [fish].” When they did this, there were so many fish that they couldn't draw the net in.

The other apostles apparently didn't realize who it was on the shore, but John did. He said to Peter, “It's the Lord!” John was left with the boat as he watched Peter jump into the water and swim to shore. John and the other apostles brought the ship to shore, dragging the net behind them, and then sat down with Jesus and ate.

After they finished eating, Jesus began to walk with Peter, and John followed them. It is probable

that John heard at least part of the conversation, including Jesus' foretelling of Peter's death, and Peter asking Jesus, “What about this man?” (referring to John). Then John heard Jesus' reply of, “If I desire that he remains until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.” Decades later, this conversation about John was still remembered, so that when John wrote his account of the good news of Jesus, he had to make it clear that Jesus wasn't saying John would never die—just that John's fate was unimportant to the command of Jesus to “follow me.”⁶¹ That is a lesson that we would all do well to remember—it doesn't matter what anyone else does, our command is to follow Jesus.

John after the Ascension

After listening to Jesus teach about the “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” and seeing the Lord ascended into heaven, John stayed in Jerusalem with the rest of the apostles.⁶² On the day of Pentecost, John heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and he started preaching the gospel in another language. People gathered around to listen, and were amazed by what was happening.⁶³ After Peter spoke up and proved that Jesus is the Messiah that had been prophesied in the Old Testament, John spent several hours baptizing people into Christ,⁶⁴ and rejoicing at the salvation received by them.

Some days later, John accompanied Peter to the temple during the hour of prayer, 3:00 PM.⁶⁵ They

⁶¹ This whole incident is found in the last chapter of John, especially verses 20-23.

⁶² Acts 1.

⁶³ These events are recorded in the second chapter of Acts, specifically verses 1-12.

⁶⁴ If we assume that the apostles were not hurrying people along, we can estimate that each apostle baptized one person per minute (it can be done much quicker than that, but we'll go with longer period here for the sake of argument). That means that each apostle could baptize 60 people per hour. There's 12 apostles, so that makes 720 baptisms per hour. At that rate, the apostles themselves could have easily baptized the 3,000 souls into Christ in just over four hours. And since the sermon took place around nine in the morning (Acts 2:15), that would make the baptisms completed by around 1:30-2:00 in the afternoon. Even if they went twice as slow, they'd still have gotten everyone baptized while there was still daylight.

⁶⁵ It should be noted that this was not a time which was commanded by God, but was something that the Jews had gradually turned into a tradition. There was nothing wrong with it, and the two apostles did not sin by observing the religious traditions of the Jews. They would have sinned if they had attempted to bind it on others, or if they had condemned others for taking that time to pray. Religious traditions, so long

⁵⁶ *The Daily Study Bible Commentary on John*, notes on John 20:1-10.

⁵⁷ Luke 24:33-34. The actual appearance to Peter isn't described in the Scriptures, but it is referenced in this passage, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:5.

⁵⁸ John 20:24-25. For why Thomas may have been absent during this meeting, see the chapter dealing with him.

⁵⁹ Even the Jewish leaders knew the tomb was empty, for they paid the soldiers who were guarding it to lie and say that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15).

⁶⁰ Mark 16:9-15.

came upon a man who had never walked before, a man who was physically impaired from the time of his birth to prevent him from ever being able to walk. Men carried him each day to the temple gate so that he could beg for money to survive. As John walked towards the temple, the man asked him and Peter for money. Instead of money, the man was given something even greater—healing. John and Peter walked into the temple area with this man clinging to them, leaping for joy, as the people began to stare and follow them because they recognized this as the lame man who had been unable to ever walk.⁶⁶ Peter took the opportunity to preach a sermon to the people, resulting in thousands believing in Jesus. But the priests and Sadducees were extremely upset,⁶⁷ and they arrested John and Peter, leaving them in jail overnight.⁶⁸

The next morning, John, as well as Peter, was called to stand before the Sanhedrin, and questioned about how they were able to accomplish this great miracle. The council wanted to know where John and Peter got the miraculous power, and also by whose authority it was done.⁶⁹ They already knew that the miraculous ability had to have come from God (see John 3:2), but they wanted to know who gave them the authority to go into the temple complex and heal this man. The book of Acts only records Peter speaking, but it is obvious that John wasn't silent during this time, because after they

as they do not violate the Law of God, are fine—understanding that they are *traditions* and not something to be bound upon others, nor something to condemn others for observing.

⁶⁶ This incident is recorded in Acts 3.

⁶⁷ The priests were upset because if what Peter and John were preaching was true, their service in offering sacrifices was no longer valid. Additionally, as the priests were teachers in the temple area, they would have had quite a fit of jealousy when the people flocked to hear John and Peter. The Sadducees were extremely upset because Peter's sermon was promoting the resurrection—something which they vehemently denied. In essence, Peter's sermon identified the Sadducees as false teachers, and they didn't like it one bit.

⁶⁸ The response of the people is seen in Acts 4:1-4.

⁶⁹ Acts 4:7. Campbell makes the following observation on the question of the council: “*Ποια δυνάμει*, not *ποια ἐξουσία*—physical strength. In what strength—in what name? There was *strength* and *authority* also in the name of the Lord. But as to the spectators—in this case of physical infirmity—their attention was absorbed in the *strength* put forth.” (Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles, Translated from the Greek, on the Basis of the Common English Version. With Notes*. New York: American Bible Union, 1858, page 25).

were done answering, condemning the Jewish leaders for murdering Jesus Christ, the Bible says: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter *and John*, and perceived that they were unlettered and common men, they marveled, and recognized that they had been with Jesus.”⁷⁰

The council couldn't speak against John or Peter, because the proof of their claim was standing right next to them in the form of the formerly crippled man. Instead, they threatened them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus, to which John and Peter both replied, “You judge whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God; for we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard.”⁷¹ Even though threatening John and Peter was completely ineffective, they threatened them again before finally letting them go, because they were too afraid to punish the two apostles.⁷²

John and Peter, after being released, went to the other apostles,⁷³ and reported what had happened.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Acts 4:13. KJV says “unlearned and ignorant,” but this isn't accurate according to the present use of those terms. Robertson says, “**Unlearned**...Unlettered men without technical training in the professional rabbinical schools of Hillel or Shammai. ...**ignorant**...a layman, a man not in office (a private person), a common soldier and not an officer, a man not skilled in the schools.” (*Robertson's Word Pictures*, on Acts 4:13). The Greek word translated “ignorant” is *idiotai*, from where we get our word *idiot*.

⁷¹ Acts 4:19-20. Note the two negatives in the last part, “we are **not** able **not** to speak.” In other words, “It is impossible for us to remain silent.”

⁷² Acts 4:21-22.

⁷³ Acts 4:23. The word “company” (KJV) certainly includes the apostles, though some believe it includes other Christians as well. Campbell says “...to *their own friends*, not especially to the Apostles.” (*Acts of the Apostles*, page 28). This is unlikely. The Greek word, *idios*, means “one's own,” and is used in the Bible to refer to one's own countrymen (John 1:11), one's own family (1 Timothy 5:8), one's own disciples (John 13:1), and one's own friends (Acts 24:23). The group under consideration all prayed together, asking for continued boldness, and the result was a miraculous filling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31), and “**great** [miraculous] power” was exercised *by the apostles*, not by the Christians in general (Acts 4:33). The context, and what we learn from Acts 8 relative to the way miraculous gifts were passed on (including the inspiration mentioned in Acts 4:31), leads us to conclude that John and Peter went to their own company, that is, they went to the other ten apostles.

⁷⁴ The other Apostles (and other Christians too), would have been worried about John and Peter, since they no doubt would have heard of their arrest and heard that there was going to be a trial of sorts. Most likely, the apostles were gathered for

The whole group prayed together, asking for continued boldness, and as a result, God filled them with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke again with boldness, and were able to exercise “great power.”⁷⁵

Sometime later, after Stephen was murdered and Saul of Tarsus began to viciously persecute the church, John and the other apostles received word that Philip had gone into Samaria and converted many of them to Jesus Christ. They were excited about this new information, certainly remembering the words of Jesus before He ascended that the gospel would be spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, and to Samaria as well.⁷⁶ The apostles chose John and Peter to go to the Samaritans,⁷⁷ with the purpose of facilitating their reception of the miracles which were given by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ It is interesting that John was sent, since at one time he asked for power to call down fire on a village of Samaria⁷⁹—what a difference now! Some have suggested that John and Peter were sent in order to confirm to the Jews in Jerusalem that the addition of the Samaritans was approved by God, and not just something cooked up in the mind of Philip.⁸⁰

After arriving, John and Peter went to God in prayer on behalf of the Samaritan Christians, asking that they might also receive the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit. They were then guided by God to lay hands on certain individuals for this purpose.⁸¹ When Simon, a magician-turned-Christian with a significant desire for prominence, saw this, he of-

fered the two apostles money if they would give him the power to pass on the miraculous gifts. Peter and John both replied, condemning his actions and him as well if he did not repent, after which Simon asked them to pray to God on his behalf so that the things which they had said wouldn’t happen to him.⁸²

After this incident, John and Peter gave their testimony about Jesus, and proclaimed the word of the Lord to them. Then they left that city, returning to Jerusalem, but stopping to preach in many Samaritan villages along the way, converting more souls to Jesus Christ.⁸³ Upon returning to Jerusalem, they no doubt gave a first-hand report of the things which occurred in Samaria to the other apostles who had sent them, and joined with them in rejoicing about the new souls that had joined in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The joy in the growth of the church continued, but John also experienced some sadness. The Gentiles had just begun to be added to the church, which upset many of the Jews greatly. Herod, who continually sought for the approval of the Jews, arrested and killed John’s brother, James.⁸⁴ Such a thing pleased the Jews, and certainly John was happy that his brother had passed into Paradise, but there was no doubt a great sadness that he would no longer see his brother in this life.

Within a few years, a great controversy erupted in the church over whether Gentile converts to Christianity must first be circumcised. Paul, Barna-

a time of prayer on behalf of John and Peter. Christians did this same thing in Acts 12 when Peter was in jail (see especially verse 12).

⁷⁵ Acts 4:31, 33. See also the author’s notes on this passage in *The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*.

⁷⁶ Acts 1:4.

⁷⁷ Literally, the apostles *apostled* John and Peter (Acts 8:14). The word “sent” (KJV) is the verb form of *apostle*.

⁷⁸ Acts 8:14-16. This passage is treated extensively in *The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts* by this author. See there for a much fuller explanation and proof that the reception of the Holy Spirit is equivalent to being able to perform miracles.

⁷⁹ Luke 9:54.

⁸⁰ See *Robertson’s Word Pictures* on Acts 4:14.

⁸¹ It was not a universal promise that all Christians would receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38-39 limits it to a single generation, and then only to those whom God selected for that purpose. It is obvious that Simon had become a Christian (Acts 8:12-13), but he only knew that the Holy Spirit was given by what he saw take place when the apostles laid hands on others—he did not know it from personal experience, but only from seeing it. Thus we have an example of a Christian who never “received the Holy Spirit.”

⁸² Acts 8:18-24. Simon’s response in verse 24 proves that John wasn’t a silent partner in the condemnation. Simon said, “You [plural] pray to the Lord for me so that none of these things which you [plural] have spoken happen to me.” Whether Simon ever truly repented is difficult to say. We would like to think that he did, especially based on his belief of the condemnation that was pronounced on him, but that is inferring something that might not be a necessary inference. It is the almost universal declaration of early Christian writers that Simon remained apostate and worked to lead people away from Jesus. See the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Simon Magus.” Ignatius calls him “the firstborn of Satan” (James Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*, “Simon Magus”).

⁸³ Acts 8:25.

⁸⁴ Acts 12:1-2. It is generally assumed (and quite probably right) that James was beheaded (see Johnson’s *The People’s New Testament with Notes*, on Acts 12:2), though the words used by Luke don’t demand that interpretation. “The Jews considered beheading a shameful death” (*Robertson’s Word Pictures*, on Acts 12:2), which explains why it pleased them to see it happen to one of the leaders of the Christian movement.

bas, and Peter were the star witnesses for God during a large gathering in Jerusalem to deal with this issue. After the matter was decided, John, Peter, and James (the brother of our Lord)⁸⁵ gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, showing that they endorsed the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.⁸⁶

Thus we see John being connected with the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.

John as an Author

It is often argued that the writings of John (the Gospel, his three letters, and Revelation) were the last ones to be written, and are to be dated between AD 90-100.⁸⁷ It is more in keeping with the biblical information to place his writings before AD 70.⁸⁸ By this time, John was an older man⁸⁹ who was writing to Christians to warn them about apostasy,⁹⁰ to remind them to stay faithful,⁹¹ to encourage downhearted Christians,⁹² to remind them about the words of the Lord in regards to the overthrow of Judaism,⁹³ and to comfort them with the knowledge

⁸⁵ See chapter dealing with this James for more information on his role during this incident.

⁸⁶ Compare Acts 15 with Galatians 2:1-10.

⁸⁷ See Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1989, pages 18-19, and his, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and James*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1963, pages 206-207.

⁸⁸ The promise of miracles from God in the church (including inspiration) was limited to the time between the death of Jesus Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem (see Zechariah 12:10-14:2, especially noting 13:2), a 40-year period (see Micah 7:15), which would take place during the “last days” of Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:16-21, Isaiah 2:1-2). When the completed word of God came, the miracles would cease (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Since, according to the Bible, miracles ended in AD 70, then the completed word of God also had to be finished by that time as well. For a much more in-depth explanation of this topic, see the Appendix, “The End of Miracles” in this author’s book, *The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*.

⁸⁹ 2 John 1.

⁹⁰ 2 John 7-11.

⁹¹ 2 John 8.

⁹² 3 John.

⁹³ 1 John 2:18 (see especially in Greek, where John says “it is the final hour, and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists: therefore we **know** it is the final hour,” and compare it with what Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 in regards to the signs preceding the final overthrow of the Jews and the Jewish system).

that their persecutors will be overthrown.⁹⁴

The Gospel According to John

By this point, three other gospel accounts had already been written,⁹⁵ so there was no need for John to write one unless he had information that needed to be presented that wasn’t in the other accounts.

Matthew wrote to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus focused on Old Testament prophecies, starting with the birth of Jesus. Mark wrote to convince the Roman readers that Jesus was a powerful leader who died for them, beginning with the herald announcing His coming. Luke wrote to show the humanity of Jesus in precise historical terms. By the time John wrote, however, a large contingent of Jewish Christians were leaving the faith, going back into Judaism.⁹⁶ By doing this, they were denying the power of Christ. So, when John wrote, his focus was to show the origin, power, and authority of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was [in His very nature] God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and apart from Him, nothing was made that was made. ... He came to His own [people] and His own [people] did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become children of God, believers in to His name: which were born, not of blood,

⁹⁴ See the entire book of Revelation. The persecutors who will be overthrown by God in Revelation are the Jews. Compare Matthew 23:34-39 with Revelation 18:10-19:2. See also Arthur Ogden’s fantastic work, *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, and this author’s work, *Things Which Came to Pass: A Study of Revelation, Class Handouts*, Cobb Publishing, 2014 (As of this writing, the commentary/teacher’s guide, *Things Which Came to Pass: A Study of Revelation*, is still being revised).

⁹⁵ Matthew was written first, around AD 40 (see chapter on Matthew for more information), while Mark and Luke were written in the mid to late 50s. Since Luke doesn’t include any of the information from John’s gospel (except that which is also found in Matthew), yet claims that he “traced accurately” (implying that he did much research) the things which he wrote. The only logical, biblical conclusion that can be drawn from this is that Luke wrote his gospel prior to John writing his. Since Acts (Luke’s sequel to the gospel) was written around AD 62, it is no stretch to say that the gospel could easily have been written by AD 58. For more information on the dating of the New Testament writings, see *Redating the New Testament* by J.A.T. Robinson.

⁹⁶ See the entire book of Hebrews.

*nor of the desires of the flesh, nor of the desires of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelled among us (and we admired His glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.*⁹⁷

John repeatedly stresses the deity of Jesus throughout his gospel account. John 1:1, 14 shows us that the Word which became flesh is, by His very nature, God.⁹⁸ Several times, John records Jesus applying the words “I AM” (which the Jews would have understood as a reference to Jehovah) to Himself.⁹⁹ John says an Old Testament vision of Jehovah was actually a vision of Jesus.¹⁰⁰ In short, John wrote to prove the deity of Jesus and to show that it is only through Jesus that eternal life can be gained.¹⁰¹ This is quite powerful when you consider that Jewish Christians were leaving Christianity in large numbers at the time it was written—this book would have been quite timely.¹⁰²

The Letters of John

Like Peter did in his second letter, John stressed the *reality* of Jesus Christ by appealing to himself as not only an *eye-witness*, but also an *ear-witness*, and one who *studied* and *touched* Jesus while He was here on earth.¹⁰³ He also made it a point to re-

⁹⁷ John 1:1-3, 11-14.

⁹⁸ The arrangement of the words in Greek, as well as the lack of the definite article in Greek before “God” at the end of John 1:1 shows that what is under consideration is the *nature* or *character* of the Word. Jesus Christ is, in His nature, God. He is distinguished from God, when it is a reference to the Father, but He shares of the same nature. What God is, the Word is. See the New English Translation (NET) at this verse.

⁹⁹ John 6:35, 48, 51; 8:16, 23-24, 28, 58; 9:5, 9; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:6, 8.

¹⁰⁰ John 12:39-41, a reference to Isaiah 6:10 where the word “Jehovah” is used.

¹⁰¹ John 20:30-31.

¹⁰² Certainly there are other reasons John wrote, and many other things we could mention that are unique to John’s gospel account, but these will suffice for our purpose. For more study on the uniqueness of John’s gospel, see the introduction to Guy N. Woods’ *Commentary on John*. Most commentaries on John’s gospel will include mention and elaboration on these points.

¹⁰³ Compare 2 Peter 1:15-19 with 1 John 1:1-4. Since they are dealing with the same problem (people denying the reality of Jesus Christ), it make no sense to say (as some do) that John’s first letter couldn’t have been written until AD 90 because he is supposedly dealing with Gnostic teachings which didn’t arise until very late in the first century. It’s universally agreed that Peter was killed during the reign of Nero, yet he dealt with the same issues, so this “proof” for a late date for

mind them of what they possessed through Jesus Christ: (1) the forgiveness of sins (2) the knowledge of God/Christ (3) overcoming Satan, and (4) strength.¹⁰⁴ He also forcefully stated that just because someone is a Christian doesn’t mean they are incapable of sinning—in fact, far from it:

*If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*¹⁰⁵

He focuses on the importance of love quite as bit as well, telling them what they are supposed to love (each other),¹⁰⁶ and what they are not to love (the world, neither the things of the world).¹⁰⁷ And he also shows his care for the faithful,¹⁰⁸ while also showing his frustration with and repudiation of false teachers¹⁰⁹ and those who tried to rule the church.¹¹⁰

Like Paul, John’s wrote both to individuals and to congregations (with benefit to the universal church).¹¹¹ And thank God that he wrote these letters, because they contain wonderful comforting information about salvation, both then and now.¹¹²

Revelation

While John was on Patmos, an island which was a “rock quarry...used as a place of banishment for certain types of offenders,”¹¹³ he received a revela-

First John is ridiculous.

¹⁰⁴ See 1 John 1:12-14.

¹⁰⁵ 1 John 1:8-10.

¹⁰⁶ 1 John 2:10, 2 John 5-6. It’s worth noting here that, according to John, the command to love one another also includes walking in the commandments of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁷ 1 John 2:15.

¹⁰⁸ 3 John 1-4.

¹⁰⁹ 2 John 7-11.

¹¹⁰ 3 John 9-11.

¹¹¹ 3 John was written to Gaius. 2 John was written to “the elect lady and her children,” which is most likely a reference to the church in Jerusalem and the members thereof. It cannot be that John is writing about a specific individual woman, for this “lady and her children” are said to be known and loved by “**all them** that have known the truth.” There was no woman that well-known. But the church in Jerusalem was known to all Christians (what Christian hasn’t heard about Pentecost and the Jerusalem church in the book of Acts?). It is also possible that this is speaking of the church universal, but that makes John’s closing statement in 2 John very confusing. If the “elect lady” is the universal church, who is her sister?

¹¹² 1 John 1:7, 9; 5:13.

¹¹³ Burton Coffman, commentary notes on Revelation 1:9.

tion from Jesus Christ. It's generally assumed that he was exiled to Patmos by the Roman Emperor,¹¹⁴ but that's not explicitly stated. It might be that he was evangelizing.¹¹⁵

In writing the Revelation, John simply wrote what he saw and how he reacted to it. He was overwhelmed by all that he saw, at one point fainting,¹¹⁶ at another point breaking into tears,¹¹⁷ and then worshipping the angel who delivered the message to him.¹¹⁸

This book was written to encourage faithfulness,¹¹⁹ to foretell the vindication of Christ and His apostles,¹²⁰ to describe the glorious church,¹²¹ and to comfort first-century Christians with the promise of the destruction of their persecutors.¹²²

John, According to Tradition

It should be noted, that though many words and actions are ascribed to John, *tradition* does not mean *truth*. This is especially true when it comes to his travels and death. There are conflicting traditions about *when* John died, *who* killed him, *where* he was living prior to his death, *who* banished him to Patmos, *when* he was banished, *if* he was actually banished there, and even there is even doubt that the John of early Christian tradition is supposed to be identified as John the apostle. In other words, when someone appeals to tradition (especially when connected to the apostle John) to make their case, it

¹¹⁴ Among the early writings that take this position, there is not agreement about which emperor banished him there. Many claim Domitian, and thus some expositors take the position that it had to have been written around AD 95-96. John A.T. Robinson (in *Redating the New Testament*) says that Domitian acted as emperor (even calling himself the emperor) prior to Vespasian's arrival in Rome to take the throne, and so it could have taken place around AD 70. However, there are very early Bible translations (second century) which include in the title of the final book of the New Testament, "...when he was exiled to Patmos by Nero."

¹¹⁵ Foy E. Wallace argues that John went to Patmos for the purpose of receiving the Revelation and evangelizing. See his *The Book of Revelation*, notes on Revelation 1:9.

¹¹⁶ Revelation 1:17.

¹¹⁷ Revelation 5:4.

¹¹⁸ Revelation 19:10.

¹¹⁹ Revelation 1:3, 2:10.

¹²⁰ Revelation chapters 18-19.

¹²¹ Revelation 21.

¹²² The entire book of Acts shows that the primary persecutors of Christianity in the first century were the Jews. It is their overthrow that is pictured in the book of Revelation. For more details, see *Things Which Came to Pass: A Study of Revelation* by this author.

isn't a very strong case.¹²³

Pre-Crucifixion

The *Gospel of Nicodemus*, written between the second and fifth centuries,¹²⁴ says that after Jesus was condemned to be crucified, John ran to find Mary and tell her what was happening, bringing her and the other women to the cross.¹²⁵ This same work also says that John was present with Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea when they buried the body of Jesus.¹²⁶

Post-Crucifixion

John's apostolic work, according to various ancient writings, had him remaining in Jerusalem until the death of Mary;¹²⁷ going to Hierapolis, where he aided Philip and Bartholomew, who had been captured;¹²⁸ to Ephesus,¹²⁹ where he was supposedly

¹²³ This is nowhere more obvious than in the dating of the book of Revelation. The evidence for the late date is built almost exclusively on traditions, suppositions, and non-inspired writings. See Foy E. Wallace's introduction in *The Book of Revelation*, as well as Arthur Ogden's *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*.

¹²⁴ There is no real consensus on the date of this writing. Tischendorf takes the earliest position, late second century; Smith's Bible dictionary places it at the end of the third century; while the editors of the *Ante-Nicene Library* give the mid-fifth century as the likely date.

¹²⁵ *The Gospel of Nicodemus: The Acts of Pilate, Second Greek Form*, chapter 10. Found in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 429-430.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 11, page 431.

¹²⁷ See Woods, Guy N., *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, page 13. Woods attributes this belief to Irenaeus, but gives no reference for verification, and this author cannot locate such a statement among the writings of Irenaeus. J.M. Harden, in Hasting's *Dictionary of Christ in the Gospels* ("Mary, The Virgin), speaks of the conflicting traditions that place Mary's death in both Jerusalem and in Ephesus. Nicephorus Callistus, in his *Church History* (book 2, chapter 3), says Mary died in her 59th year, which would be—at the latest—AD 47 (This assumes that she was 12 when Jesus was born, and that He died at age 33 in 33 AD). It could have been as early as AD 42, depending on her age at Jesus' birth and what year Jesus actually died (we prefer AD 30).

¹²⁸ *The Acts of Philip*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 499-500. See also page 508, which contains a slightly different version of the same story.

¹²⁹ Here, the assumption must be made that the John placed in Ephesus is the same as the son of Zebedee, which is by no means universally accepted. There are many who argue for a "presbyter John" in Ephesus, as distinct from John the apostle. If this is the case, then all the traditions about John being in Ephesus are actually talking about another man with the same name, and are of no value whatsoever. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* ("John, the Apostle") takes the

boiled in oil (yet escaped unharmed);¹³⁰ and then arrested and brought to Rome, where he drank poison in front of Domitian, yet did not die, brought a man back to life, and healed one of the king's demon-possessed servants.¹³¹ Afterwards, it is said that Domitian exiled him to Patmos (instead of killing him) where John saw the Revelation.¹³² Then, after the death of Domitian and Nerva, Trajan became emperor and John was released to go back to Ephesus and preach.¹³³ And when he was old, he had some young brethren dig a trench for him to be buried in, and the next day, John was gone.¹³⁴

These traditions may reflect some grain of truth (tradition is almost universal that John spent time in Ephesus),¹³⁵ but the timing doesn't fit the biblical

position that "presbyter John" is the same as John the apostle, though they do give some of the evidence that is used against this interpretation.

¹³⁰ See Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*;

¹³¹ *The Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian*, in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 561-562.

¹³² This is a ridiculous claim for several reasons, one of which is that in this same writing, it was supposedly the things written in the Revelation that caused him to get arrested in the first place. Another is that Revelation was written about the fall of a city which was "at hand" and "shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1, 3). Rome never fell—the citizens welcomed the invaders into the city. Rome was never destroyed—there were very few buildings burned, and the rest was left standing. Even ignoring these historically-verifiable facts, the "fall" of Rome was hundreds of years away—hardly "at hand" and "shortly come to pass."

¹³³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 20, paragraph 10.

¹³⁴ *The Acts of Philip*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 562-564.

¹³⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 1, paragraph 1 (see also Chapter 23). The footnote to the *Post-Nicene Fathers* edition (Vol. 1) says:

"The universal testimony of antiquity assigns John's later life to Ephesus: e.g. Irenaeus, *Adv. Hoer.* III. 1. 1 and 3. 4, etc.; Clement of Alex., *Quis Dives Salvetur*, c. 42 (quoted by Eusebius, chap. 23, below); Polycrates in his *Epistle to Victor* (quoted by Eusebius in chap. 31, below, and in Bk. V. chap. 24); and many others. The testimony of Irenaeus is especially weighty, for the series: Irenaeus, the pupil of Polycarp, the pupil of John, forms a complete chain such as we have in no other case. Such testimony, when its force is broken by no adverse tradition, ought to be sufficient to establish John's residence in Ephesus beyond the shadow of a doubt, but it has been denied by many of the critics who reject the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel ... The chief arguments urged against the residence of John in Ephesus are two, both a silentio: first, Clement in his first *Epistle*

chronology, which places the writings of the New Testament within forty years of Pentecost.¹³⁶ There are ancient writers who assert that John was killed early by the Jews, which would fit Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 20:23.¹³⁷

Apocryphal Writings

There are multiple writings done in the centuries after the end of inspiration that claim to have been written by the apostle John, though they were all forgeries. *The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary* is supposedly a first-hand account of John being instantaneously transported from Ephesus to Jerusalem (along with all the other apostles from wherever they were—even the ones who had died) to be present for Mary's last days.¹³⁸

Another, called the *Acts of John the Theologian*, are said to "have not the slightest historical value."¹³⁹

to the Corinthians speaks of the apostles in such a way as to seem to imply that they were all dead; secondly, in the Ignatian Epistles, Paul is mentioned, but not John, which is certainly very remarkable, as one is addressed to Ephesus itself. In reply it may be said that such an interpretation of Clement's words is not necessary, and that the omission of John in the epistles of Ignatius becomes perfectly natural if the Epistles are thrown into the time of Hadrian or into the latter part of Trajan's reign, as they ought to be (cf. chap. 36, note 4). In the face of the strong testimony for John's Ephesian residence these two objections must be overruled. The traditional view is defended by all conservative critics as well as by the majority even of those who deny the Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel. The silence of Paul's epistles and of the Acts proves that John cannot have gone to Ephesus until after Paul had permanently left there, and this we should naturally expect to be the case.

¹³⁶ For a detailed explanation, see the Appendix in this author's *The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*, as well as the introductory lessons in *Things Which Came to Pass: A Study of The Revelation*.

¹³⁷ The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* ("John the Apostle") gives some of the evidence, but disagrees with their conclusions.

¹³⁸ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, pages 587-591.

¹³⁹ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* ("Apocryphal Acts," Section III., Acts of John).

Eeking AND SAVING THE LOST

Gerald Cowan

Jesus summed up His mission from God and His ministry on earth in these words: ***“For the Son of man came to seek and save the lost.”*** (Luke 19:10). Not physically or geographically lost. Not intellectually or mechanically lost. Spiritually lost, separated by sin from God the Father and any hope of heaven. Not lost animals. Not lost angels or demons or extraterrestrials. Lost humans – lost men and women, lost accountable children. Jesus was anointed and commissioned as Christ by God to save the spiritually lost people of the world. God loved them. God wanted a way for them to be found, to be saved from irrevocable destruction, to return to Him, and to have the promise of everlasting life. He sent and gave His Son to accomplish His will (John 3:16-18, 34-36).

How did Jesus accomplish that? By being sacrificed on a cross – a cross which became an altar on which he as the High Priest of God gave his own life's blood as the purchase price for the past, present, and future sins of all mankind (you should re-read now the last three chapters of each the four “gospel” accounts in the New Testament). After his sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection, just before his ascension to heaven to rule there with the authority of God, at and as the right hand of God, he gave to his personally chosen apostles the authority and the promise of sufficient power to continue his mission to seek and bring to salvation all the people of the world (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:44-52, John 20:19-23). They were to teach others to do as they themselves were sent to do, to obey the Lord's will and teach others to do the same. Our mission is the same as that of the apostles and of Christ himself – nothing has changed. We are told what to teach others, what to require them to do in order to have the Lord's salvation.

How can we carry out our commission from the Lord, to seek and save the lost? I will tell you four things that are almost self-evident – they need very little explanation or commentary, but we will elaborate somewhat on each of them.

WE CAN'T “GO” TO THEM BY SITTING WHERE WE ARE AND WAITING FOR THEM TO COME TO US.

In the accounts of Matthew and Mark Jesus is quoted as saying *“Go ...Go into all the world.”* I hear people who don't want to be moved out of their personal comfort zone say, “We don't have to *go* physically to ‘take the gospel’ to other places. It's the gospel that needs to go, not necessarily the people. We can *send* the gospel everywhere.” Of course we can do that – we are actually doing it. With the technology and communication resources we have it is easy to do it. We can call them, email them, send the word to them, or even send somebody to them with the message – assuming you can find anybody who is willing to *go*.” But technology is no satisfying substitute for personal contact, personal interaction with the people you are trying to reach and influence. Jesus surely is not opposed to using any available means, personal or impersonal. But he doesn't say, “Send the light.” He says, in effect, “Take the light and deliver it personally.” You know the “missionary song” about “the Macedonian call,” based on Paul's vision of a man of Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10). The messenger did not say, “Send us some literature about the gospel.” He said, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And immediately after that Paul and his mission group endeavored and determined to *“go to Macedonia and preach the gospel to them”* (10).

Many who need to hear, and whom we say we want to hear, will not come to a church building or knock on some Christian's door and ask to be taught. They will not often come uninvited to our worship assemblies or our ‘gospel meetings.’ Maybe they are waiting to see if we are really serious about wanting to share the good news of and from Christ with them by coming to where they are, not waiting for them to come where we are.

WE CAN'T “NICE” THEM OUT OF SIN AND INTO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I know where the Bible says, quoting Jesus,

“Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). I know how that is misunderstood and misapplied. I also know how Peter's words of encouragement to wives who have non-Christians husbands are misunderstood and misapplied. *“If those husbands do not obey the word they may, even without the word, be won by the conduct of the wives, when they note the respectful and pure conduct of the wives”* (1 Peter 3:1-4 ESV). Being kind, patient, helpful, and busy doing good works may impress others, but it won't make Christians of them.

Neither Jesus nor Peter, nor any of us who preach the Lord's words, can convert anybody to Christ or bring anybody to obedience to the Lord without words. They may see your good works, but if they do not know Who or what prompts you to do them, if they do not know to Whom they should give credit and glory they will probably not give glory to God or to His Christ. You must explain that the Lord is the One who leads you to be good and do good, that He is the One you serve and the One to whom you want to introduce them that they might serve Him too. There is no coming to God without faith and belief, and there is no belief or faith possible without words of information, instruction, and exhortation. So Jesus said go and preach the gospel, teach them the gospel truth of God and exhort them to obey Him even as you obey Him. Your example of goodness may open the door, but it will take patient teaching to keep that door open and keep the person on the other side of it listening, learning, and growing into the likeness of Christ with you.

WE CAN'T “LOVE” THEM OUT OF DAMNATION AND INTO SALVATION.

Evident love, like good works, will attract and impress and open some doors, but love does not save the loved one. Love will motivate you to go to others, do good for others, teach and encourage and exhort others, but unless they hear and accept and respond obediently to the Lord we share with them they cannot be saved (Romans 10:9-17). God will not save them because you love them – as of course you do: *you love your neighbor as you love yourself*, don't you? (Matthew 22:36-40). God will not save them because He loves them – as He undoubtedly does (John 3:16). Christ will not save them because He loves them – as He does, and proved it by

giving himself for all of us (Galatians 2:20). Love prompted God to be merciful and mercy prompted His grace – His plan, salvation's plan – to be completed by the faith and works of faith of the one to be saved (Ephesians 2:4-10). We probably do not stop loving the lost, even those we believe will end in damnation and destruction. Nor does God. But it takes an obedient response to love's prompting to save anyone from that terrible destination.

WE CAN'T “PRAY” THEM OUT OF HELL AND INTO HEAVEN.

“Pray for me. Pray that I won't be lost. Pray that I'll be forgiven and saved.” I've heard that request many times from many people. A man named Simon asked apostle Peter to pray on his behalf that the perdition he was threatened with could be averted and avoided (Acts 8:14-24). Some believe prayer can alleviate one's punishment in purgatory (or in torment of hades), and perhaps secure one's release from that penitentiary of the soul. But it is not so. The truth is, one's condition after death cannot be changed. Those in paradise cannot help those in torment, nor can there be any crossing over from one condition to the other (Luke 16:19-26). One cannot, in this life or in the life to come, do for others what they are required to do for themselves. It is a hard lesson, but it is part of the gospel we are to preach to the lost once we find them and are able to address them in the name of Christ. There is an effective remedy for the lost but it must be applied *by* them, not *to* them, while they can still exercise their own will.

WE AREN'T TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE-DOWN ANYMORE

There is salvation. The effective remedy for lostness is available to all. But willingness to accept and apply it is often absent. Unclaimed, the remedy might as well be absent too.

There was a time, according to the Bible, when Christianity was “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). There was also a time, not long ago, when we revised the statement to suggest we are “turning the upside-down world right side up.” We are obviously not currently accomplishing that worthy goal. What is the reason for our failure?

Before continuing this, we need to understand what “the world” is and what our mission to it is. The world is not planet earth, nor the solar system in which it is placed, nor even the universe at large.

I will not dispute that we humans are to be caretakers of the physical world of God's creation, stewards of the environment in which He has placed us. But some of us are squatters who occupy space that does not belong to us and disrespectfully abuse it and trash it, showing contempt for the true owner of it. The physical world is temporary, not eternal. Its time is limited, though only God knows when its end will come – we have no way of knowing.

The world God loves and gave His Son Christ as a sacrifice to save (John 3:16-17), the world to whom we are sent with the gospel of salvation (Mark 16:15-16, Matthew 28:19-20) is the humans in it, only those creatures able to hear and understand it and respond obediently to it, those who can obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered to them (Romans 6:17). Our mission is to the people. Emphasize it: our mission as Christians is not to save the planet but to save the creatures in it whose soul-spirits are made in the image of the Creator God (Genesis 1:26-27) by sharing with them the gospel of His Son. The power of God to save every person of the world is revealed in that gospel (Romans 1:15-17).

Just so you understand, we are not speaking here of reversing climate change – or whatever other ambiguity may be laid at the feet of obstreperous mankind. We are not talking about watering the desert and planting grass and trees there, nor even about cleaning up the rivers, lakes, oceans, and wells and making the water fit for human consumption. We do not minimize the importance of protecting our habitat, but what is eternally important is the pollution of soul that has overwhelmed the inhabitants of planet earth. The upside-down world sees the creature comforts and personal pleasure pursuits of mankind, and unlimited freedom to do whatever pleases them at any time as life's *summum bonum*, the chief good and goal of our existence on earth. “I want it and I intend to do anything necessary to get it, no matter what it may cost or do to the one I take it from” justifies every form of crime and violence. Those who try to “understand” the criminal mind and appease, pacify, or bribe the criminals – hoping to “nice” them and “love” them into repentance and change by “appealing to their sense of decency and fairness” should have learned by now that it doesn't work. Mumbling an obsequious “I'm really on your side and sympathetic to your cause” only adds fuel to the fire. God doesn't work that way, nor does He

demand that we do so. The flood (Genesis 6-9) was a warning that God isn't fooling around with the wicked and that He has set a “point of no return” which, if one goes past it, will bring a result in punishment from which there is no reprieve. The world of humanity may be approaching, may actually have passed, that point of no return. Only a few individuals – am I one of them? Are you? – and not the whole of mankind are still able to escape by turning submissively, obediently, trustingly to the Lord. His gospel is still being preached, but not often with the fire and fervor that once turned the upside-down world right-side up. Our failure may be caused by our lack of fire and fervor, as well as by our lack of faith and fidelity to our God.

If you think I am wrong to say we are failing to bring the lost world to God through Christ you may need to think a little more deeply. See the true situation of the church, see the growing hostility of BLM and ANTIFA and LGBTQ+ to Christianity; see the rapidly diminishing and disappearing presence of altruistic virtue and the near absence of true godliness and the tsunami of selfishness and “my wayism” among those who refuse to retain the knowledge of God but hypocritically call upon Him to save us from our precarious perch among a persecuting people who see us as a pestilent presence and as pernicious preventers of their peace. Have we lost the progress made by the faithful Christians of the past? If so, what has caused it? Is it possible to reverse the apostasy, regain the momentum, and recover the backsliders – is it still possible to save a significant portion of the world from itself and the forces of evil that motivate it? If the answer to that question is no, should we hunker down, cowering in our insecure and fallible bunkers and wait for the Lord Jesus to come and rescue us? If the answer is yes to our question, how must we go about the reformation, restoration, and reclamation of God's people and the church's potential? What can the righteous do when the foundations are crumbling (Psalm 11:3)?

THE WORLD IS TURNING THE CHURCH UPSIDE DOWN.

The concept of conquering by infiltration and capitalization upon internal differences is ancient. The Trojan Horse fiasco is a great example. Julius Caesar's “divide and conquer” meme is notable. The misquotation of Abraham Lincoln's prediction of destruction not from outside but from internal flaws

and misdirection is certainly apropos. Senator Joseph McCarthy was certainly correct in his warning that infiltration by forces hostile to a republic such as ours could lead the nation to self-destruct (it is coming true!). But the greatest teacher of all time had a simple, undeniable, and oft-proved warning about it: a little leaven hidden in the dough or the mix of ingredients would eventually work its way through the whole batch (Matthew 13:33), a figure also used effectively by Paul (1 Corinthians 5:6-7, Galatians 5:9) – easily and frequently applied by preachers and teachers today, as I am attempting to do here.

Our Lord also warned about enemies in one's own house and family (Matthew 10:36). Paul dared to accuse elders of the church of being or producing and sheltering ravenous wolves who would not spare the flock of the Lord (Acts 20:17, 28-30). Failure to prevent or counter false teachers and preachers has caused countless troubles and destructions of faith in the Lord's church. Elders, influenced and guided by preachers, have invited and allowed the world into the church, have disallowed the naming and marking of the intruders and infiltrators, and prohibited naming problem people or problem doctrines, deciding against being “unnecessarily offensive” – being politically correct and socially correct in our efforts to evangelize in order to avoid offending anyone by suggesting they are wrong – and trying to convince everyone that they can come to the Lord just as they are (the most effective and most loved “invitation” hymn is “Just as I am... O Lamb of God, I come”), rather than persuading people to come to God through Christ in order to be remade into what He wants and requires them to be.

Tens of thousands of professing Christian churches exist to accommodate all tastes, concerns, desires, and preferences of people. Churches have learned to preface their evangelistic efforts with a demographic survey to find out what people want and to assure success by giving them just what they want. They want sexual freedom and license? Give it to them. They want health and wealth? Give it to them. They want power and control? Give it to them (at least let them think they can have it). We no longer have to warn people that they should *love not the world with its lust of the flesh and eyes and its proud spirit* – not to seek the things of the world above the things of Christ (1 John 2:15-17). It is no

longer necessary to go outside the church and into the world to find those things. The world has come into the church and turned it away from God. No wonder the world holds the weak and malleable church in contempt. What can we do? Is it too late to do anything? Have we allowed the defeat of the church and the Christ? Yes, I know, I am repeating my complaints and may seem to be yielding to pessimism. Not so! There is something to do. Recovery is still possible.

WE NEED TO WORK TO TURN THE UPSIDE-DOWN CHURCH RIGHT-SIDE UP AGAIN.

Stop praying for God to heal the world, restore us to our rightful mind, impose moral sanity and social equanimity, and above all reimpose spiritual stability. Instead, save ourselves from the wayward generation which we have inherited and to which we have contributed (Acts 2:40). We will be saved by yielding to God who works in us to do what pleases Him (Philippians 2:12-13). Let us quit pretending the world is better than it is, or that we are better than we are. As workers together with God (2 Corinthians 6:1-2) let us make ourselves and our world what He still wants it to be.

Are you one of the lost persons Christ is seeking to find and save? Or, are you one of the redeemed and restored persons who have been found and saved by Christ? If you believe you are in the saved and secure group, what evidence can you offer to support your claim?

Being a *believer* in God is not enough, though multitudes are trusting that it is enough and that God requires nothing more. They have accepted the false doctrine taught by many or most of the non-Catholic (Protestant) churches that Jesus paid it all for all who believe in him and his redemptive work – that there is, therefore, nothing more to be done, no ‘works’ of any kind for us to do. His once-for-ever sacrifice, his death on the cross, paid for all human sin from that point onward and the price, once paid, could not be imposed again upon anyone, even upon guilty sinners, as long as they placed their faith and trust in Him and accepted His payment for them. Of course they must also believe in what followed his death: his resurrection and his ascension to heaven where He now rules at the right hand of God, where he has prepared a place for all believers whom He will someday come for in order to take them to their eternal reward. All of that is so refreshing and reassuring, and so easy: by grace

alone through faith alone in Christ alone eternal salvation comes – just believe and it's all done and can't be undone or taken away from you. What reasonable person would refuse such a gift from God?

But – but – but, does scripture actually teach such a doctrine? Does God really say that salvation is free and without cost or obligation to anyone who will accept it? Is there nothing at all a person has to do to receive it? God has never said such a thing. But some have tried to put such words into God's mouth, have made such promises in the name of God, but it is not the truth. Be careful that you do not believe the lies that have been told in the name of God and perpetuated by ignorant believers and by naive and trusting persons who repeat and perpetuate the lies. Is salvation really “not of any human works,” so that there is nothing one must *do* in order to receive it?

A work is anything one can or must *do* – or, in the passive sense, have done to or for him. There are some works one can and must do, works which cannot be done to or for the person by others – not even by God or His Christ. Even the act of believing is a work, something one must do for himself. No other person can believe for you, or for any person other than himself. When one asks, “What must I *do* to be saved?” the answer will be, “You must believe” (Acts 16:30-31). In his commission to his disciples Jesus charged them, “Preach the gospel. One who believes it and is baptized will be saved. One who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). Notice the two things Jesus specifies here: belief and baptism. One must believe for himself and must accept baptism being done to him. Without either one the person is not saved but remains lost.

The warning Peter gives in 1 Peter 4:17-18 must be addressed. Christians are not exempt from judgment; *judgment begins with the house of God. If the righteous* (those who believe and do the right things) *are scarcely saved* (such righteousness is the bare minimum) *what shall be the end of those who do not obey the gospel?* The answer is not given by Peter in that context; he expects it to be inferred from what he has said before and what he will say after. But Paul gives a straightforward answer. Christ, at His return, will utterly destroy the unbeliever and those who have failed to obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Both Peter and Paul imply that obedience to the gospel is required.

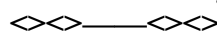
Believing is not the only requirement – believ-

ing is not enough. Devils believe in God and tremble in fear for their own destined end (James 2:19). What else must one do to obey the gospel? Personal repentance is also a must. One who does not repent of his or her own sins and errors – which means not only to be sorry but to stop doing the wrong thing and start doing the right thing, to correct and repair the wrong things done as much as is possible and to request God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is not automatic or universal, it must be requested and any necessary condition for receiving must be complied with. One who does not repent will perish unforgiven (Luke 13:3, 5 and Acts 2:38).

We have already noticed here (from Mark 16:15-16) that one must be baptized. Baptism is also mentioned as a requirement in Acts 2:38. When he asked what to do in order to be saved, Saul of Tarsus was told not to tarry but to be baptized, calling upon the Lord in obedience (belief and repentance implied) in order to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:10-16). It may surprise you to know that, after the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, no accountable person is said to be saved without baptism. That is God's word. Those who tell you that if you believe you will be saved, nothing else required are lying to you. Lies told or believed or acted upon will not save anyone.

Being a member of the church is not a guarantee of eternal salvation. Churches may accept one on the basis of their own laws and requirements, but that is no guarantee that the Lord accepts what the church allows. The church, if it is true to God's word, is bound by His laws, requirements, and restrictions. It is also required that one be faithful as a Christian in the church. The law of God for His church is clearly set forth in scripture – that is not within the purview of the present lesson. But, as a salient warning to those who trust church membership to save them we suggest one read carefully Matthew 13:24-30, 36-44 and note that at the end of the world at the return of Christ all the counterfeits, pretenders, and unfaithful members of the church will be removed from it and destroyed. Don't trust the church or your belief in the Lord to get you safely to heaven.

Jesus seeks faithful, penitent, obedient believers to receive His salvation. Those who do not intend to accept and follow Him should not expect to be saved by Him. They remain lost.



GOD MAKE US THE MEN YOU WANT US TO BE

Gerald Cowan

Where can we find strong men to stand
With us and You against all odds?
The time we live in now demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands
That will not yield to others what is God's

Give us men of honor and good will
Whom spoils of office cannot buy,
Men with great insight, strength and skill,
Whom lust and stress of office cannot kill.
Men of integrity who will not lie.

In public or in private thought
Help keep our heads above the fog
And empathize with all who've sought
To free us from some tyrant, and have fought
A selfish and self-loving demagogue.

While we are mumbling thumb-worn creeds
Strife rules the day and freedom weeps.
The darkness cannot hide their deeds;
Wrong rules the land. In vain the righteous pleads.
Let us not fear while waiting Justice sleeps.

God, let us be men, big in heart.
Armed with the Holy Spirit's sword,
Let us be prompt to do our part
And stay with Him with whom we've made a start,
Not giving up to serve some other Lord.

When Christ returns we then shall know
The fullness of His wondrous love
Who, by his words and deeds, did show
That He from whom eternal blessings flow
Finds in us the men He wants in heav'n above.

How great to know that we can find,
In Christ, the Lord who makes us free
Of stress, abuse, and strife from blind,
Unreas'ning hate-filled men of darkened mind.
God makes us the men He wants us to be.

Sports Taught Me About Worship



MITCH ROBISON

No one can deny there is an incredible amount of interest in sports in America today. The Super Bowl is annually among the highest rated television shows of the year. The advertising money that goes into sports is mind boggling, along with the salaries many big league players make. Right and left, cities are erecting new ball parks and stadiums to house teams they have or teams they hope to get.

It is almost impossible in our culture to find an individual that has no interest in any sport. Some like baseball, some like football, others like hockey or golf or basketball. Some prefer professional sports, others college or high school sports. But just about everyone in America cares about some sport or other. I doubt anyone would argue that our culture is saturated with and hungry for sporting events.

In observing all this interest in sports, if you pay attention, you can begin to notice that there are some similarities between sports and worship toward God. Some of the things that drive sports and the fans who are part of those sports are similar to how we come to God in worship. Sports taught me some interesting things about worship toward God.

The More You Care The More It Matters

I have to admit I used to be a serious football fan. More specifically, I was a serious Green Bay Packer fan. Then, after Favre was traded and we moved to the Atlanta area, I became a huge Falcons fan. If my team didn't win, it would ruin my whole week until they played again and could redeem themselves. After a while, I became more interested in my first love, baseball. And the good thing about baseball

was that your team played several games a week. So if they lost a heartbreaker, the next day they could hit a walk-off homer and make you forget all about the misery you faced the day before. I was so into sports that my mood would sometimes depend on the success of my favorite teams! I admit I was way overboard in my interest, but it did make a serious point about sports, and about worship.

If you dislike a sport (like baseball) you aren't going to pay much attention to that sport. If you care about a sport (like baseball) then you will keep up with the standings, you will know the statistics and how your favorite team is doing. The more you care about the sport the more it matters how your team does.

This principle works in worship as well. The more you care about worshiping God, the more it matters how often and how well you worship God. If you don't care about worship, the worship experience will be dull and boring. But if you care, it will matter how you worship and what takes place when you worship.

God challenges us to develop a hunger to be closer to Him, to approach Him in worship. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2). David said it long ago, we are to thirst for God's presence just as a deer pants for water. As water is needed for a deer to live, so worship should be so important to us that we cannot live without it. Jesus encouraged us to hunger for God in a similar way. "Blessed are those who hunger and

thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). We can learn to love worship, to care about it so much that we feel as if we cannot live without it. The sad fact is that people who don't get much out of worship often didn't care much going into worship.

Bigger Investments Mean Bigger Returns

Sports are a lot of fun for many people to watch on television. But, to many, it is even more fun to take in a ball game at the stadium. And, even better than that is being able to play the sport yourself. So, millions of people watch baseball, but many also play it in softball leagues and little league. The principle is simple: the deeper you are involved, the more benefit you get from the sport.

Worship is like this as well. Worship is at its heart a personal encounter with God by an individual. Although we may assemble with many other believers, ultimately worship is between me and God. And God commands me to worship personally. "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people" (Psalm 116:12-14). Notice, I am to lift the cup, I am to pay my vows. Over and over again, we are told to come personally before God and offer our personal worship. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). Jesus said it plainly: we are to worship God in spirit and truth. That is, our worship must come from the heart, which is an individual/personal event.

Worship requires that I get involved. If I want to benefit from worship I must personally invest in the process. I must sing, I must pray, I must give. All of these are personal actions I take to offer my praise to God. The more I get involved with worship, the more I will get out of worship, just like with sports.

You Must Follow The Rules

Every sport I know of has a book of rules that must be followed. These rules are not designed to ruin the fun of the participants, but to regulate the game and make it fair for all who are playing or watching. Nothing ruins a game more than an unfair call by an official or umpire. "We wuz robbed" is the one of the saddest things to hear after a game is

over. If enough calls are blown or if enough unfair judgments are made, people lose confidence in the sport and interest wanes.

Interestingly, worship is like that, as well. When Paul wrote about the worship services of the church in Corinth, he told the believers there that their worship should "be done decently/properly and in an orderly manner" (1 Cor. 14:40). Paul was commanding us to follow the rules, just as we do in our sporting events.

Imagine how silly baseball would look if the batter hit the ball and ran to third base instead of first; or if the fielders tackled the base runners instead of tagging them with the baseball. If we expect our sports to follow the rules, we should expect the same in our worship.

That is why New Testament worship should be simple, plain and easy to do. The rules God has given are not complicated or hard to grasp. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). This command is not hard to follow, we are to sing from the heart to the Lord as we teach and encourage each other. The rules are easy and the worship is much better if you follow them.

"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Again, the rule seems straight forward and simple. The early church gathered on the first day of the week to eat the Lord's Supper. If we are going to have genuine worship that honors God, we should follow the same rules, that is, we should also gather to participate in the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

It might seem unimportant to change the rules God gives for worship, but just like sports, when we start making up our own rules the game will quickly disintegrate. We would never let each player or team decide what rules it will play by. How can we think we can let every person decide what rules will be used to worship God?

It Always Boils Down to Basics

If you listen to the coaches, they will always tell you the same thing. One team did the basics better, that is why they won. When you boil down football, it isn't about schemes and game plans as much as it is always about who blocked and tackled the best. In fact, no matter how brilliant the game plan, if you don't do the basics, you will not win. Baseball is

about running and throwing and hitting and fielding. Every sport is actually pretty simple when boiled down to its basics.

Worship is like that, as well. No matter how many prayers are offered, or how many songs are sung, worship always boils down to a few basics. When we plan a worship service and we think about how best to set an atmosphere for genuine worship, it will always boil down to some basic things that must be done. Experiencing worship always depends on doing the basics.

First, our lives must reflect the God we worship.

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-8). Micah says it well. Bringing the most elaborate and well thought out offerings to God will be meaningless if we have not tended to the basics. In this case those include justice (doing right), mercy (being forgiving) and humility (submission) toward God. If we live selfish, sinful, and unkind lives, our worship will not please God. To worship, you must pay attention to the basics long before worship starts.

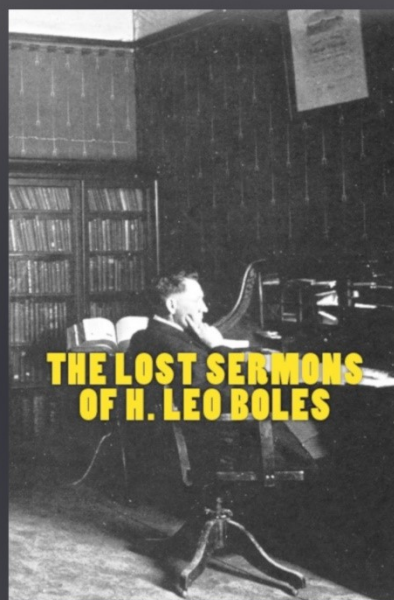
Second, worship must come from the heart. "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23). Jesus wants us to understand that worship must be from the heart, that is, must be offered in spirit and truth. No matter how well you sing or lead a prayer or preach a sermon, if it is not genuine and from the heart it will not be pleasing worship.

Finally, worship must be reverent in its approach to God. "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the inno-

cent. He who does these things shall never be moved" (Psalm 15). David sums it all up in simple ways. Who can come into God's presence and offer worship? Those whose lives reflect God, in reverence, day in and day out. When we live in constant respect and awe toward God, our worship becomes meaningful and powerful. When we ignore God in the day to day things, our worship becomes empty and pointless.

Sports Don't Really Matter

In the long run all of America's infatuation with sports is meaningless. It may be fun, it may be entertaining, it might even teach lessons on team work and effort. But sports are just sports, to be played or watched for fun or fitness. In contrast, worship matters a great deal. When we come to God in worship, we are approaching the Almighty God of the creation. He deserves our highest respect and praise. That is why we should care. That is why we should invest deeply in worship. That is why we should worship by God's rules and that is why we should pay attention to the basics when we worship.



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QUOTES TO CONTEMPLATE

On a Basis for Unity

Let it first be firmly believed, that there are real and great evils, and I am persuaded every honest man will be willing to listen to any plan that promises their removal. We have departed in some measure (I believe greatly) from primitive Christianity: if we can find by what means we shall get back, doubtless it will remedy the evils which have arisen from our departure. I will mention a simple method, which I am willing to try, till some abler hand suggest a better. And it is the following. "Let all Christians worship one God...Acknowledge one Savior...Have one Confession of faith [the Bible]... One form of government...Be members one of another...Members of one church...Profess one religion... Let none be received but living members..." And finally, "let none be expelled but for a breach of the

divine law."

Rice Haggard

An Address to the Different Religious Societies on the Sacred Import of the Christian Name (1804)

On an Otherwise Unknown Brother

Thomas Adams (1798-1831) son of a Major in the War of 1812 and of the Indian Wars, did his evangelizing out from Dayton, Ohio. As a frontiersman, his education was meager, his manners awkward and his personality somewhat repelling, nevertheless he became a fruitful evangelist by reason of the purity of his heart, and his sincerity in expounding the Gospel. He became a victim of "consumption" and lived only to the age of 33.

Colby D. Hall

The "New Light" Christians



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TABERNACLE SHADOWS THE HOLY OF HOLIES

The most secretive part of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies. The High Priest was allowed into it on only one day per year, the Day of Atonement. It was entered through the Veil which was hanging just past the Altar of Incense.

A Tabernacle

The Holy of Holies was called a tabernacle (Hebrews 9:3). This was to emphasize that each room was a separate entity and that it was temporary.

It is called the 'Holiest of all' in Hebrews 9:3. The Greek is 'holy holy.' Double wording is to magnify the value. Representing Heaven as a place of increased holiness, value and purity. It does not have the intent of minimizing the holiness of the Holy Place. Only those who have pure holiness in the first tabernacle are allowed in the second tabernacle. (While the Holy of Holies on earth was a temporary facility, the true Holy of Holies is a permanent dwelling.)

The Veil

The Veil is discussed in Exodus 26:31-32 and Exodus 36:35-36. It was made of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work. It had Cherubim on it.

There were gold hooks and four sockets of silver. It was hung on four pillars of shittim (acacia) wood which were overlaid with gold. These may represent Christ, who God "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 30). It is because Christ is all these, that we can glory and approach through him to the Father (1 Cor. 1:31).

There were no capstones on these pillars. These pillars are Christ as the sacrificed one, making him the only one qualified to allow or deny entrance. He completely gave over his life to the Will of God. It was the ultimate action of humility. Thus, he gave up his own head (will) which means he does not have a royal deifying capstone.

John 7:38, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." The will was given back to him when he sat on the Throne, when God the Father accepted him and gives him the Sonship inheritance.

"Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? ... Unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom" (Hebrews 1: 4, 5, 8).

Revelation 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

It was called the second veil in Hebrews 9:3. It divided the holy from the most holy. It was the barrier and the way. Only the sinless, holy person could enter the Holy of Holies. Christ was the One. He is also the one who gives others that sinless, holy appearance and character.

Hebrews 10:19-20, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by

the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh."

Jesus is the only way to heaven. He is the only way to the Throne of God. He is the only way to the Mercy Seat. He is the only way to the Covenant Law. "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

It is called the Veil of Testimony (Leviticus 24:3). Christ's flesh was given for our sins and is the testimony of God's love. It is testimony to his desire for full commitment. It is testimony to his faithfulness. It is testimony to his fulfillment of promises and prophecies.

The Cherubim were sewn with gold thread. They guarded the entrance to Heaven and against access to God. Galatians 1:9, "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." By the cherubim being sewn into the veil, it demonstrates their servanthood to the one whom they decorate. They are at his bidding. Only the sinless can enter into the Holy of Holies.

Of interest, is that the blue is the first color mentioned, instead of fine linen. This may indicate that the primary color of the veil is blue. Blue is the symbol of heaven. Christ is said to have arisen from the earth through the clouds into heaven (Luke 24:50-52; and Acts 1:9-11).

When Christ was crucified the Veil was torn completely in two, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Access to God did not originate from man, otherwise the curtain would have been split from bottom to top. Access to God was only allowed by God. Christ had to be torn. Grace/Mercy and Truth are seen in the two separated sections of the curtain.

The curtain of the Temple which was split at Christ's death was 4 inches thick and 70 feet tall. It was an impressive hanging. It was not easy to tear. It was of immense weight. Only by the plans and the will of the Godhead could it have been done.

The Ark and Mercy Seat

These are discussed in Exodus 25:10-22; and 37:1-9. The Ark was 2.5 cubits (4 feet, 4.5 inches) long. It was 1.5 cubits (2 feet, 7.5 inches) broad and high. It was made of shittim (acacia) wood which was overlaid within and without with gold. It was

topped by a crown of gold. There were two gold rings on each side. Seen in the Ark is Christ as the God/Man. He was the Son of God and Son of Man who has now been given all power and authority.

The Mercy Seat was made of solid gold. The full amount of gold used in the Tabernacle is estimated at 5800 pounds or almost 3 tons. At \$1856.42 per ounce (value as of this writing), the value would be \$172,275,776.00.

The Cherubim were made from the same piece of gold. This may indicate that all of heaven has been pained by the suffering which sin brought. In Isaiah 63:9, we read that in Israel's affliction God was afflicted. He was troubled with their sins. And if God was troubled, it only stands to reason that all in heaven were troubled. However, the glory of heaven has not been damaged. There was one cherub on each side of the Mercy Seat and they faced each other. Their stretched-out wings formed a canopy over it. Cherubim were first mentioned when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden in association with a flaming sword. There they were guarding the Gate to keep men out. Here they were guarding the Throne/Mercy Seat. They face the Throne and see the blood that allows the High Priest to approach.

In 1 Peter 1:10-12, Peter talked about the prophets who wanted to know about the salvation which was to come through Christ's sufferings and then his glory. He says that even the angels desired to look into it. Perhaps these Cherubim are representative of the angels in heaven looking with interest into the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. It is of interest that there were two angels at Christ's tomb to give testimony of his resurrection (John 20:12). And there were two angels giving testimony at his ascension regarding his return (Acts 1:10-11). So, the two Cherubim here may represent glorious testimony of his resurrection, ascension, and final return in Judgment.

God Spoke

God spoke from the place where he resided. God resides in the place of Law and Mercy. Numbers 7:89 was given after the dedication of the Tabernacle:

"Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubim."

Propitiation

The word ‘propitiation’ in the Septuagint is ‘Mercy Seat.’ Romans 3:24-25, can read, “Being justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a Mercy Seat (hilasterion) through faith in his blood.”

Hebrews 10:12, tells that Jesus sat down on the right hand of God. He was seated because his sacrificial work was done and he was now in authority.

1 John 2:2, “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” (1 John 4:10).

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ...,” (Titus 3:5).

“For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him,” (Psalm 103:4).

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy,” (Psalm 103:8).

Exodus 34:6-7, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”

Proverbs 20:28, “Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy.”

Christ on the Mercy Seat

Christ is on the Mercy Seat due to his crucifixion and resurrection. Romans 1:4, “And declared to be the son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

It is a seat. There were no seats for the Israelite priests, including the High Priest. Christ sits and rests from his earthly work. He is still active in his royal and heavenly High Priest duties.

The Mercy Seat is Also the Throne

It shows Jesus there. The Lord of hosts “dwells between the cherubims” above the Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam. 4:4; and 2 Kings 19:15). “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it” (Isa. 9:7).

“Yet have I set my king upon My holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2:6). Zechariah 14:9, “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth.” He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of

lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto...” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

We are invited to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The Cloud

There was no physical representation of God other than the Cloud that filled the Holy of Holies. This was labeled as the Shekinah by the Jews.

Psalms 80:1, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the Cherubims, shine forth.” If not giving light, the High Priest would not be able to see the Ark and Mercy Seat. The High Priest would not be able to touch the blood to them. This shining is another evidence that the cloud over Israel was giving off light.

God had commanded that no graven image ever be made of him (Exodus 20:4). God gave no commandment for anything to be on the Mercy Seat. He would sit on it.

The High Placement

By the Mercy Seat being above the Ark, one is impressed with the high placement of the Throne above men. Jeremiah 17:12, “A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.” So, the Mercy Seat is also called the ‘sanctuary.’

Isaiah 6:1, “...I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...”

Ezekiel 1:26, “... And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.”

Blood Needed

Blood was needed at the Mercy Seat, but it was shed somewhere else. On the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16:14-15, “He shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin-offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat.”

Mercy was contingent upon blood. This, because God’s Justice mandated judgment and punishment.

He could not exercise mercy at the expense of justice. Mercy was situated above the Law by having the Mercy Seat upon the Law. This indicated that mercy was also based in the Law.

Law demanded death. Galatians 3:10, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” But God provided that death in Jesus for those who followed the Law. No one follows the Law perfectly, except Jesus. Galatians 3:13, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” God’s mercy thus was in effect. Death was covered by blood which gives life.

Christ Presented Himself

On the Day of Atonement the blood was sprinkled before the Mercy Seat showing Christ presenting himself to the Father.

It was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat showing him sitting on it. It was ‘on,’ meeting a need of God. Sprinkled ‘before,’ meeting our need to have a sanctified place to stand before him.

Christ’s blood was the common thing between man and God.

The Christian can only stand before the Throne because Jesus’ blood sanctified the place before the Throne. More importantly, the High Priest could only stand before the Throne by sprinkling blood where he would stand. Jesus presented his blood so that he could stand before the Father.

Jesus could only sit on the Throne by presenting his blood to sanctify it to himself. Thus, his blood on the Mercy Seat. Without his blood, the Mercy

Seat could not be a Mercy Seat.

Coals

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest took coals from the Altar of Incense in a censor. He sprinkled incense on the coals and took it into the Holy of Holies. The censor was placed on the Mercy Seat (Leviticus 16).

Christ personally took the coals (the fire from heaven representing judgment and purification) with the sweet incense (prayers and praise) and placing them between the Cherubim on the Mercy Seat. His prayers, praise, judgment, and purification are perfect. He placed his on the Mercy Seat since only perfection can sit there. And he personally accepts our prayers and praise and places them before his Father as the one and only Mediator and Intercessor.

This was man’s way of having fellowship with the Father. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

No Mercy

In Samuel 6, the Ark was opened so that the contents could be seen. The Mercy Seat had to be removed to see inside the Ark. This meant the men were looking at the Law without Mercy.

God smote 50,070 men. The people said, “Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? And to whom shall he go up from us?”

None can stand without His mercy. Only the Perfect Son of God could lead the way. The Law without Mercy meant death for all.

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SERMON: PEACE WITH GOD AND MAN

Text: Ephesians 2:14-18

Richard Mansel

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. How do we mature as Christians?
 - 1. Knowledge
 - 2. Wisdom
 - 3. Prayer
 - 4. Experience
- B. We need to dig into the Word to pull out the deep messages.
- C. “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step” (Lao Tzu).

II. CONTEXT

- A. Discuss chapter.
- B. Chapter was written mostly to a Gentile audience.
- C. Contrast:
 - 1. now (13) – once (11)
 - 2. Without Christ (12) – in Christ (13)
 - 3. Far off (13) – near (13)
- D. “have been brought” (13), 'is a passive which indicates that the Gentiles were recipients of God's action rather than a result of self-effort as already discussed in 2:8-10” (Hoehner, 362-363).

III. LESSONS

A. One New Creation

- 1. “The enmity between Jews and Gentiles was deep, ancient & enduring. Jews regarded Gentiles as unclean scavenger dogs, Gentiles despised Jews as grasping, religious hypocrites (Phillips, 71).
- 2. Societal problem leaked into the early church.
- 3. God had a solution if everyone would cooperate. But it would be hard.
- 4. Fixing the spiritual hostility would ultimately fix the physical hostility.
- 5. Formula would solve all human problems. Fix the spiritual and everything else will fall into place.
- 6. How to solve the Jews versus the Gentiles?
- 7. “Much had to be dismantled for this peace to be a reality” (Hoehner, 366).
- 8. Fixing spiritual problems requires that we use something of God to fix them. Humanity cannot do it.
- 9. Under the old covenant, Jews were near and the Gentiles were far away. Separated by law & culture.
- 10. Without Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are lost spiritually. No exceptions.
- 11. “They were at war with each other but also with God” (Phillips, 72).
- 12. Spiritually separated from God. They first had to fix this problem.
- 13. Progression through Romans 1-3.
 - 1. Survey 1:18-32 – Gentiles were separated from God.
 - 2. Survey 2:1-29 – Jews were lost.
 - 3. 3:9-18 – All humanity is lost.
- 14. Reconciliation – Romans 5:6-11.
- 15. Jews & Gentiles have to come to Christ for salvation. Spiritual hostility between God and

man.

16. To fix hostility between Jews and Gentiles they had to address the Law.
17. Jews were saved through the Law and set apart by circumcision. Gentiles were on the outside.
18. Jews misused the law. They were supposed to be shining lights to the Gentiles and the latter could become proselytes and follow God.
19. "Rather than using the law as a witness, it became a tool that enabled them to look down on the Gentiles whom they considered sinners. Hence, this caused hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Due to this and the tenacity with which they practiced their law, they were considered by the Gentiles to be prideful and stubborn" (Hoehner, 373-374).
20. Jews and Gentiles were separated by Law. But Jews made it worse by their attitude.
21. "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one..."
22. He is our peace. Nothing in Jews or Gentiles could do it.
23. "Certainly, in this text the pronoun 'our' (14) cannot have reference to Jews as opposed to Gentiles but must refer to all believers regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles" (Hoehner, 367).
24. "made both one" – Refers back to the cross. "It is not what Christ is doing but what he did 2000 years ago" (Hoehner, 368).
25. "broken down the middle wall of separation..."
26. Court of Gentiles is probably a picture of this division. Paul nearly lost his life because of that wall. But this middle wall isn't the Temple wall of the court of the Gentiles.
27. Nothing in Judaism could solve the rift between Jews and Gentiles. Only through Christ.
28. "in His flesh..." – "by the blood of Christ" in 13 and "through the cross" in 16.
29. In His flesh, Christ went to the cross.
30. "law of commandments..."
31. "The law was not put to death or destroyed but has been rendered inoperative or nullified for the believer" (Hoehner, 375).
32. "It is not that Gentiles became Jews as Gentile proselytes did in pre-NT times nor that Jews became Gentiles, but both became 'one new person' or 'one new humanity,' a third entity" (Hoehner, 378-379).

B. All Had Access

1. Because Jews and Gentiles were individuals who were now one in Christ, they could approach God.
2. "Paul does picture the two groups, Jews and Gentiles, as a single individual of a mature person" (Hoehner, 379).
3. Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
4. They are not Jew or Gentiles but a body of Christians who make up the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).
5. Bound by a new mind, thoughts, actions, direction, etc.
6. World doesn't understand that all human problems can be solved by Christ.
7. If the hostility between Jews and Gentiles can be solved by Christ, then modern problems can likewise be solved by Christ.
8. Racial, economic, educational, cultural problems must be brought before the feet of God.
9. Listen, examine, be humble, love
10. God's people should be leaders in racial harmony, not followers.
11. But we have to be at peace with God before we can be at peace with men.

READER'S REMARKS:

Regarding changes in British churches of Christ:

Our churches have changed over the past number of years, not in doctrine. We are still singing without musical instruments etc etc. Our churches have changed from evangelism through preaching, Sunday School and shall we say traditional forms. We used to have only white British in the churches but now we have some congregations which are not only solidly African but some using their mother tongues in worship. Some of the churches are outgoing and some have difficulty in blending in with British life. I am very familiar with a couple of the 'African' churches and work with them as much as I can.

All of our churches struggle with what is usually called post-Christian society and I heard the other day that 95% of children in the UK have no Christian association at all. It was traditional here for decades for all children to go to Sunday School and in State Schools every day was held a short service with hymns, Bible reading etc. Scripture was also taught for at least one session each week. This has now all gone. Sadly we live in a nation that does not know God and most do not want to know.

Every blessing

Trevor Williams

(editor of the *Christian Worker*, available at www.churchesofchrist.co.uk)

Enjoying the old-timey wit and wisdom

I've been behind in reading *The Quarterly* and just discovered J. D. Tant—what a joy! He ably takes over for Paul Darst for old-timey wit and wisdom.

John Krivak

Great articles

I wanted to send you a note is to let you know that it is my opinion the *Quarterly* is gaining all the time. This last issue was an excellent effort on your part. I liked your editorial and I was particularly happy with the article Politics, Religion And Race, the interview with John DeBerry. Also the writings concerning restoration There is an abundance of good articles and I have not finished all of them yet. Keep up the good work!

Bill Howard

About the AUTHORS

Jimmie Beller loved to smile, even though he suffered for over a decade through cancer brought on by his service as a medic in Vietnam. He loved reading, studying, and listening to sermons. He told the editor he looked just like Jeremie Beller (Jeremie and the editor both disagree with that assessment).

Gantt Carter, in addition to preaching and writing, also has the ability to teach you how to safely hit something with a small propelled piece of metal. His wife does too.

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.

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.

Chris Gardner sends a poem: “Preacher for life; married the perfect wife; has four great kids; likes to raid the fridge; favorite season is the fall; the Cards are gonna win it all.” He also thinks he’s a Jedi Master.

Scott Harp is the author of *The Sage of Jasper: Gus Nichols – A Biography*, as well as the curator of TheRestorationMovement.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.

Ted Knight has been preaching the gospel for over five decades. In addition to doing mission work in Romania, Ted and his wife Barbara have traveled large swaths of the United States, doing gospel meetings. But they both agree, there is no place on earth better than Arkansas.

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 preaches any time he has the opportunity, and enjoys reading and writing.

Mark McWhorter is an extremely knowledgeable medical expert who assisted with heart transplants, and developed protocols which today are standards. In addition to writing for the Quarterly, he also sells used books at affordable prices, and tries to help people be rational in the face of medical crises.

Jim Mitchell recently purchased the copyrights to Ivan Stewart's Open Bible Study program, and has been using it to great success. He and his wife Jennifer live in Oklahoma City, where he works with the Cherokee Hills congregation.

Gus Nichols preached and taught in Alabama for decades, and was responsible for showing thousands of people the path to the Lord. If you want to know more about his fascinating life, check out *The Sage of Jasper: Gus Nichols – A Biography*.

Paul Pollard is currently recovering from surgery. He has a love for God's word, for the Greek language that God used for the New Testament, and for the people that God placed on this earth. His commentary on Romans was published by Truth for Today in Searcy, AR.

Daniel Richardson has been married to the love of his life (Sarah) for 20 years and they have eight children ranging in age from 1 to 18. He serves fulltime in the military and occasionally fills in when needed in the pulpit. He has known the editor longer than either cares to admit, and the story of how they became great friends is interesting to say the least.

Mitch Robison preaches the gospel and does what

he can to be helpful to those who are in need. He is the author of two books of sermons (*Every Man Needs Jesus Christ*, which came out last month, and *A God Who Rejoices*, from 2019) as well as a teaching study called *Genesis: Origin of God's Chosen Nation*.

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 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 is currently getting acclimated to the higher elevations since moving to Colorado.

Ray Sullins preaches for the Kansas Expressway church of Christ in Springfield, MO, teaches at the Bible Institute of Missouri (where two of the authors for this issue graduated), and has the distinction of being both the son of a preacher and the father of a preacher.

Bradley S. Cobb has spent the last several days wishing the end of his finger wasn't black and swollen, and that firewood split itself. And he occasionally contemplates the logistics of moving 800 pounds of fresh mulch. He also seems to hear about far more conspiracy theories than he really wants to (like "President Joe Biden isn't the same as Joe Biden who was Vice President. No, the President Biden is actually JFK, Jr., who faked his own death, and had plastic surgery to *look* like Joe Biden." Yes, someone actually said that).

NEXT ISSUE:

Painful Lessons
One Cup or Multiple Cups: A Debate
Conspiracy Theories
The Life of Peter
And much more!