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Mother (and Don't Murder)

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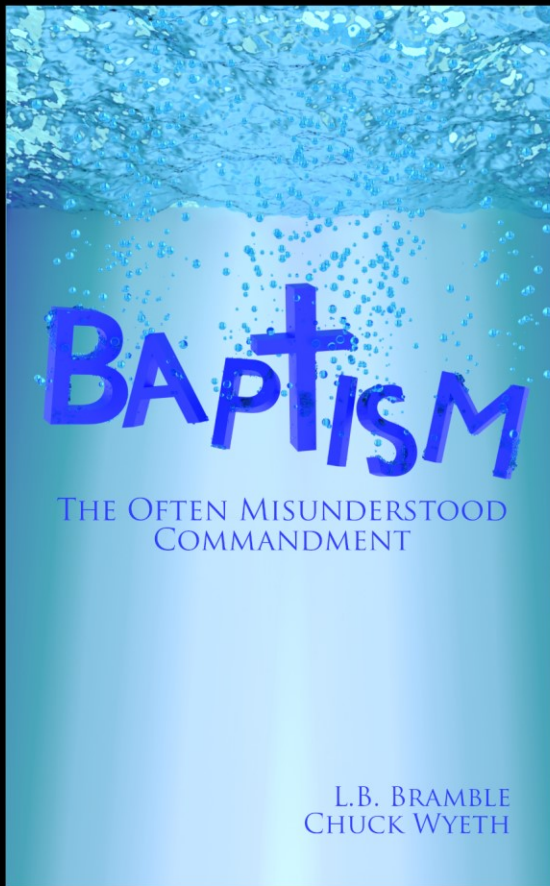
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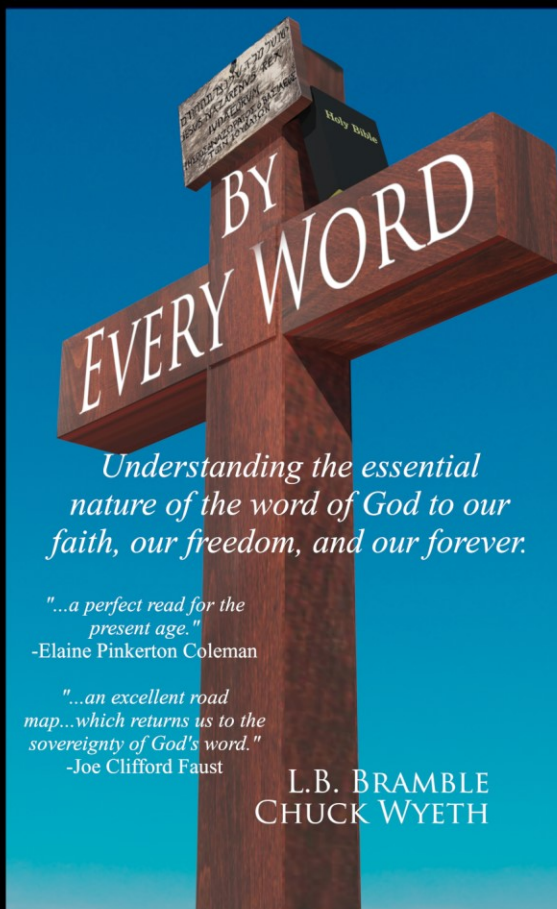


The Wise Men:
The Rest of the Story

For personal and class Bible study



Baptism: The Often Misunderstood Commandment



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The Quarterly

VOLUME 7 – NUMBER 1 – JANUARY 2023

SEVEN YEARS! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

When we were first planning to launch the *Quarterly*, a preacher I respect told me “I fear that there is not enough general brotherhood interest for that type of printed material.” Another preacher I know said the problem with most brotherhood magazines is that they look like they were designed thirty years ago, and that if I didn’t take that into account, the *Quarterly* would be DOA (dead on arrival). I took those statements to heart, and determined that the *Quarterly* would have a modern look, the old gospel, and be available as cheaply as I can produce it. So far, so good. I thank each and every one of you readers for the support you’ve given for this endeavor.

This issue is a few days late, but the wait is worth it. Trust me.

We have two new authors in this issue. Steve Higginbotham discusses a Quiz You Had Better Pass; and Stanley Sherman provides two fascinating pieces—including one about a group of people whose faith may have been handed down to them from the wise men of Matthew 2. You can also read about the editor’s not-so-stellar record at accomplishing his resolutions/goals. Check out Adam Cozort’s devotional from Psalm 1 (and the QR code that gives you bonus material). Chuck Wyeth gives us some insight into the world of Islam.

You might also find the article on the history of Cobb Publishing interesting (or you might not...), considering this is our 10th anniversary!

There are so many great things to read in this issue that I really feel like I should just stop here and let you get on with it. But then that would leave a big white space at the end of this page, and you wouldn’t want that, now would you.

Again, thank you for your support!

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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STICKING TO IT

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

I realize folks who read this at some point in the future won't realize it, but this issue is late. (A friend told me that being a week late on a *Quarterly* is nothing compared to some of the other brotherhood papers he gets, some of which are several months behind schedule.) And to be honest, it is frustrating to me, because I had grand plans for starting 2023 out *on time*.

Like so many millions, I made resolutions or goals for 2023 (some were goals, some were resolutions). And depending on which one you look at, I am either doing okay, pretty decent, or just plain bad at it. Some are easier than others. Some require a lot more dedication or thought or planning or work.

If you have ever made any resolutions or set any goals (and if you're a Christian, you have, whether you realize it or not) this little editorial is for you. Because you need to know some things right from the get-go.

You Will Probably Fail... at least a little

My goals for the year are written down in a composition notebook, followed by a specific breakdown of how I planned to work toward those specifically in January. I'll give you a little peek—one of the January-specific goals was to lose seven pounds. Two weeks in, I was down three pounds. A couple days later, I was up three pounds over my original weight. On the 30th, I was back to being down three pounds. But I ate more than I should have, and just skipped out on weighing in on the 31st.

You might wonder what this has to do with anything, and the answer is this: I failed, at least a little. I wanted to lose seven pounds in January. But (best-case scenario) I only lost three. I could look at this in two ways:

- I failed to meet the goal, or...
- I made progress, even if it wasn't as much as I wanted to.

When you set goals and don't reach them, don't ignore that *progress was still made*. Yeah, you could say you failed, but if you made any progress at all, it wasn't a total failure, because *progress was made*.

I am reminded of a man who was trying to change his life from a self-centered one to one where he showed love, compassion, and empathy for others, especially his wife. Because no man is perfect (and some of us are further from it than others), he would sometimes slip back into his old way of thinking and acting. When he realized it, he apologized and vowed to try harder, but no matter how hard he tried, he was never able to do it perfectly. He felt like a total failure. He was continually reminded of the imperfections, the problem areas. At least, until one day his wife told him that even though his slips and stumbles hurt her, she was still proud of how far he had come. Instead of measuring him by how far he still had to go, she looked at his progress. And it was that support that encouraged him and enabled him to press on and continue to improve. Had she continually focused on his failures (not meeting the goal), he would have been more and more discouraged, and it would have made it harder and harder for him to have the desire to keep working on it.

You can get back up when you mess up

It may just be a stereotype, but stereotypes are often stereotypes for a reason. People who set a

goal/resolution of dieting will invariably give in to a craving (Krispy Kreme, perhaps), and instead of stopping after a single donut, they decide, “Well, I’ve already messed it up,” and proceed to finish off three or four. Or they rationalize, “I’ve blown my diet,” and decide to blow it good by pigging out at McDonald’s or Taco Bell. And with many people, that one bad day ends their resolve, ends their dieting.

Let me share some more personal data from my list. My goal is to read the Bible through this year from the New American Standard Bible. I know if I read 4 chapters a day, I will finish before the year is up. My January goal was to read Genesis and Exodus (which is 90 chapters, about 3 per day). Well, I’ve missed some days. In fact, one week that I missed four days. I could have just given up and not gone back to the regular daily reading. But I didn’t. On the 30th I read 13 chapters, but didn’t finish Exodus until February 1st.

The point being, messing up one day doesn’t mean you have to quit. It just means you messed up one day (or four days). Acknowledge that you messed up and get back up and try it again the next day. Far too often, people live in pity parties of their own creation.

One person I know seemed to be really trying to improve his life and get past his past. He had been off drugs and alcohol for around five months when I met him. We helped him with food, transportation, and money so he could get to work, get to his court appearances, get groceries, etc. He was working hard, trying to rebuild from a life that was truly messed up. But one weekend, he decided to drink. And while drunk, he decided to get high. He went to work that Monday morning, no worries, assuming everything would be fine. Except this Monday he was given a random drug test. He called me, told me what was going on, and I told him there was only one thing to do: *learn from it so you never do that again*. He said he agreed, but since then he has had 5 or 6 different jobs, and has lost each of them because he didn’t show up for work. And each of those instances were avoidable. It would have taken a little effort, getting up earlier, but it could have been done. And right now he is waiting to go into rehab because he failed a drug screen for several different drugs.

Your life can go in a downward spiral very quickly—or you can acknowledge your mistakes and get back up and try to do better. Or as John put it, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

You need to set realistic goals

I have a friend who lost 120 pounds doing a water fast. Had he told me ahead of time that was his goal, I would have told him that was unrealistic. But he did it. One year (when I was at my heaviest) my goal was to lose 70 pounds...by July. Given my job, my appetite, and my wife’s fabulous cooking, that goal was totally unrealistic.

The problem is, we want to set goals or resolutions that put us at the ideal. We set goals of being at the ideal weight, having the ideal amount of savings, doing the ideal amount of Bible reading, doing all these grand things that would make us enviable or praiseworthy in whatever area it is. But the problem is, we want to be someone who *is* that weight, who *has read* that much Bible, who *has* that much money—and we haven’t gotten it through our heads that we first have to be the person who *works* to lose that weight, who *puts forth the effort* to read the Bible, who *practices radical self-control* to save that money. We just want the end result.

I remember hearing a professional author being interviewed. He said that several people tell him they want to be a writer. But he gave this insight—he said most of the people that say this don’t want to be a writer, because that takes time, work, writing and re-writing, and taking hard criticisms, followed by more writing and re-writing. Instead, they just want to have written something. They want the end result without the work.

In one of Jesus' teachings, He talked about realistic goals. He talked about a man building a tower, but halfway through having to quit because he didn't have enough money to complete it—he set an unrealistic goal for the tower. He talked about a king going to war with his army, and finding out the opposing army was much bigger—the king's goal of defeating that army was unrealistic.

I realize that writing down on your resolution/goal list, "Read Matthew by the end of the month" isn't a monumental task, but it is realistic (a chapter a day will get you through Matthew in any month). Reading the New Testament through every month is doable, though probably not realistic for a lot of people, given their schedules.

Make your goals realistic, because it means you can actually accomplish them. And you know what happens when you accomplish goals? It makes you more confident in accomplishing other goals. And you find that you can do more than you originally thought.

Final thoughts

I do have some very simple resolutions on my list (specific topics to pray for every day), which I've actually done every day this year. And I have some quite lofty goals that I am working towards, but whose accomplishment ultimately is in someone else's hands.

But above everything else, I ask you remember the same thing I tell myself, and the same thing the Bible encourages us to do: press on. When you stumble (as you will), don't give up. Get back up and try again. Don't let the bad days cause you to quit. Instead of looking at how far you have to go, look at how far you've already come.

You can do it.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WRITE FOR THE QUARTERLY?

Our guidelines are as follows:

1. You must be a member of the church of Christ. The only exception is if you are writing to debate a matter of doctrine or biblical interpretation. In these cases, and at our discretion, a response from one of our regular writers will appear with it.
2. Articles must deal with topics of the Bible, Christianity, Christian living, doctrine, church history, or anything that is connected to those topics.
3. The article should be between 1.5 and 6 pages, 12-pt font, single-spaced.
4. Footnotes are welcome, if you quote someone or want to add additional information.
5. Bible translation is up to you, just try to note which version you're using at the end of the first quote.
6. Deadline for the next issue is December 30th, 2022.
7. You must include a brief, one-paragraph biography for inclusion in the "about the authors" section. Otherwise, the editor reserves the right to make something up. (Now everyone is wondering which, if any, of the bios are real...)

If you have any questions, feel free to email the Editor at Editor@CobbPublishing.com



God, Can You Hear Me?

Andy Robison

One Bible verse of utmost pathos is Psalm 42:3:

*My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
“Where is your God?”*

The godliest of individuals can sometimes feel very, very far from God, even with God’s assurances of answered prayer (cf. Luke 18:1-8). Consider Psalm 6:6-7:

*I am weary with my groaning;
All night I make my bed swim;
I drench my couch with tears.
My eye wastes away because of grief;
It grows old because of my enemies.*

Enemies in the forms of illness, depression, persecution, or many other causes often produce in people of faith doubt as to their position with God. They may be forgiven in heaven’s eyes but not in their own hearts. The trials they patiently endure still hurt, although they know the passages that reassure us that such troubles produce strength (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:2-3). They might sense a lack of companionship:

*Look on my right hand and see,
For there is no one who acknowledges me;
Refuge has failed me;
No one cares for my soul.*

Ultimately, just like the Christ, they may feel God has forsaken them (Psalm 22:1; Matt. 27:46 [“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”]). They may not verbalize that sentiment but the agony of its wonder pierces the soul. Thus, our song’s opening phrase: “God, can You hear me?...I cry to You with all my power!”

The song continues, “Through the veil of Jesus’ flesh, from this valley strewn with tears, I can climb up to the mountain of the Father.” Such phrasing bears explanation.

One beauty of the Psalms is allowing God’s followers to work through raw emotions such as this. The answer to these empty feelings is then exquisitely portrayed for the New Testament Christian in the book of Hebrews.

The Hebrews’ writer describes the anguish of Christ’s soul, likely from the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He uttered, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26:39). Hebrews 5:7-8 seems to comment on that prayer. If so, it was made “with vehement cries and tears.” It was a wailing, not a whisper. It was made to God “who was able to save Him from death.” God had the power to spare Christ from the cross. Further, Christ “was heard

because of His godly fear.”

So, here are the elements. Christ was not alone, but felt alone, and anguished over the seeming silence from God. This is just one of the ways in which Christ was “tempted in all points as we are” (Heb. 4:15), but it is a powerful one.

The only way out for Christ was through. He had to endure the cross. Then, having so suffered, He became the perfect Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), Advocate (1 John 2:1), High Priest (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16) for His followers. Hebrews 6:19-20 uses the image of the temple’s veil (separating the Most Holy Place in sanctified dignity) to say that Christ thus opened the way for His followers to always be heard by God: “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever...” (Heb. 6:19-20).

Thus, from this valley of a sin-filled earth, strewn with tears, Christians can go to God “through the veil of Jesus’ flesh.” They can climb to the “mountain of the Father.” This is more than an emotional high, but the kind of language that signifies the spiritual presence of God. Hebrews 12 assures the readers they have not come to the Old Covenant’s Mount Sinai covered in blackness and smoke and regarded with fear. Rather, they have come “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God” (12:18-22). That is the path paved through Jesus’ sacrifice.

The song continues, Christ “lives to hear the pleas from His children worn and weak as they come into His presence with their praise.” Hebrews 7:25 so affirms, “Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” Because of this salvation is this admonishment: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15). God deserves and loves such praises of thanksgiving.

Verse 2 of the song speaks of the reconciliation of the Christian’s will with God’s will. “I can pray

in Jesus’ name for my will to be the same.” 1 John 5:14-15 specifies to Christians that asking according to God’s will is an assurance of reception. Such requests should never be a coaxing to get God to agree with one’s earthly desires, but rather a training of the Christians’ will to be in tune with heavenly things. The song continues, “For the Father wants to mold me in His image.” That is the principle of Romans 8:29: He desires His people to be “conformed to the image of His Son,” “transformed” (Rom. 12:1), as it were.

Again, the song: “For He knows what’s best for me, if I’m bound or if I’m free, I can come into His presence with my praise.” There, the circle is complete back to the original issue. Christians may feel that God is far away because they are not getting the answers they like, but “He knows what’s best for” them. Even in extreme cases, should people be “bound,” imprisoned—literally or figuratively—He still knows. Paul expressed settled contentment even during His confinements (Phil. 4:10-13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Thus, the Christian can express, “I know that God, You will hear me. You will hold me. You will heal me. You will push me by Your power.” When Elijah felt depression after the Mt. Carmel victory over the prophets of Baal, God tenderly fed him, walked him, and gently told him to get back to work (1 Kings 19). God was not in the great wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12).

That is the kind of God Christians serve. He hears, even when Christians feel He doesn’t. He’s provided a way through Jesus Christ directly to His throne. People should get their wills in line with His, and then be confident that He hears and answers prayers in the way that is best for each individual.

To hear the song, *God, Can You Hear Me?*, to print a copy, or to access the PowerPoint slides (all for free), use this link:

<https://www.churchofchristsongs.com/content/god-can-you-hear-me-andy-robison>

God, Can You Hear Me?

A.R.

Andy Robison

God, can You hear, can You hear, can You hear me?

God, can You hear me now? 1. Through the

hear can You hear me? I cry to You with all my pow'r. 2. I can

veil of Je-sus' flesh, from this val-ley strewn with tears, I can
play in Je-sus' name for my will to be the same-for the

climb up to the moun-tain of the Fath-er. For He
Fath-er wants to mold me in His im-age.

lives to hear the pleas from His child-ren worn and weak, as they
knows what's best for me. If I'm bound or if I'm free, I can

come in - to His pres-ence with their praise.
come in - to His pres-ence with my praise.
Ten: Come to Him with praise.

praise, with praise.

God, can You hear, can You hear, can You hear me? God, can You hear me

now? I know that God, You will hear, You will hear, You will hear me.

You will heal me, You will hold me, You will push me by your pow'r.

HE RESTORETH MY SOUL

Jamie Beller

Among the most comforting words in the 23rd Psalm are "He restoreth my soul." While other passages make it clear the commitment and comfort of God to restore the soul of the penitent, we can appreciate that these words are within the context in which the psalmist is writing from the perspective of a sheep closely following his shepherd rather than as a sheep that has gone astray. Sadly, history shows that many have held to the belief that the need for the restoration of the soul is the result of the one in need of restoration has sinned. However, does not David show that the soul can be wounded, weakened, by means other than one's own sins (Psalm 142)? Cannot the soul be wounded by the sins of others? Cannot the soul be in need of restoration because of the toll that the trials, temptations, and tragedies often encountered in life?

From the perspective of a sheep "He (the Lord who is my Shepherd) restoreth my soul" are certainly comforting words, especially when life wounds and weakens the soul. Just as the Lord, and His people are concerned about the restoration of my soul when the need for restoration is due to sin (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20), so too is the Lord, who is my Shepherd, concerned with the restoration of my soul when my soul has been wounded and weakened by the trials and temptations of life. Likewise, the Lord's people ought to be concerned with the restoration of souls when souls are wounded and weakened by the trials, temptations, and tragedies of life (Heb. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:11-13; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Prayerfully, in doing so, we draw one another even more closer to the Lord, who "restoreth my soul."

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HOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS Relate to *TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* CHRISTIANS WHY DO WE WORSHIP ON SUNDAY INSTEAD OF THE SABBATH?

Charles R. Rose

John 1:17 informs us that, "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." And God, our Father, plainly said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear Him" (Matthew 17:5). That "hear Him" simply means "you listen to Him."

Having seen how the first three of the Ten Commandments do very much affect our lives today, being incorporated into Christ's "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25), and are quite often broken, not only by non-believers, but by those who by mouth profess Christianity [cf. Matthew 15:8]. We then looked at commandment number four and saw from the Holy Scriptures that this law of the Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel only, and was never meant to be for all of mankind. Rather, it was a sign between God and the Hebrew nation commemorating His bringing them out of Egyptian bondage (Deuteronomy 5:15; Nehemiah 9:11-14; Ezekiel 20:10-13).

We now come to commandment number five: Exodus 20:12: "Honor your father and your mother."

It is important that we address both children and their parents as we look at this commandment. After all, without sound guidance from the parents the child cannot know the how or the why of this important command of God. As we look at the New

Testament usage of this commandment, notice Paul's admonition in Ephesians 6:1-3:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Not only are we to obey our parents, and this is speaking directly to children who are still at home [from the very young through teens]; still it applies to all ages. When one marries, or leaves the parents' home to begin their own family or household, they are then out from under the control of the parents. At that time parents can and will advise, but they can no longer "order" that child's life. That child must then make his or her own decision. Pray to God, parents, that you have taught your-child "in the ways they should go" [Proverbs 20:6] that they may make sound, godly choices in life.

It isn't unusual today to see parents who are supposed to be Christians allow their small children to make their own decisions about important matters in life. There was a sister in one congregation where I preached who had a twelve-year-old son. Often she would come to services and the boy would be absent. When asked where he was, she would say, "Oh, he had a TV show he wanted to watch." Or "Oh, he was playing with friends." When questioned

about the logic of allowing him to miss services for other things she would say, "Well, we think he is old enough to make some of those decisions for himself." **BRETHREN, no twelve-year-old child has the ability to make those decisions for themselves!**

I wonder how many members of the Lord's church really believe their child is stronger than the apostle Paul was when he was a boy? Yet he recognized that *"When (he) was a child, (he) spoke as a child, (he) understood as a child ... "* Not until he *"became a man"* did he *"put away childish things."* (1 Corinthians 13:11). Too many parents today allow their children to dictate what they do rather than train them in the ways of God. A sixteen or seventeen-year-old may look very much like an adult physically, but their judgment and understanding is still that of a young person who needs guidance from godly, loving parents. And children below that age are still children who must be brought up *"in the nurture and training of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4).

Parents, please listen. Now is the time to teach and train them in the ways of the Lord. To wait until that child is old enough to decide for himself or herself, or to allow that child to dictate to you what they want, rather than what God's Holy Word says they should do, is to turn your child over to Satan and condemn their soul for eternity.

From the Deuteronomy chapter five account of the Old Testament law of the Ten Commandments, notice that the context extends through chapter six where the people were commanded,

"And these words which I command you to-day shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

*I wonder how many members of the
Lord's church really believe their
child is stronger than the apostle Paul
was when he was a boy?*

Are we to do any less under the New Testament law of Christ? Many parents, by their attitude and actions, teach their children that church is not all that important. I have known families who, if one member had the sniffles, the whole family would miss church services. I have witnessed parents discouraging their children from participating in church activities because they wanted to get home early. The mother of the twelve-year-old mentioned a moment ago used to forbid him from attending church gatherings for our youth as a form of punishment.

What kind of Christian example is that? What are we teaching our children when we do those things?

You children, whether you are small or in high school, listen to me, to disobey

your parents is to dishonor them, and God will not allow that!

We are looking at the Ten Commandments and how they affect Christians today, and this fifth commandment says *"Honor your parents for this is right,"* and it is repeated in the New Testament law as well.

Some young people today are stubborn, unruly and rebellious. They don't seem to care how much they hurt and dishonor their parents. Colossians 3:21 states, *"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."* 1 Samuel 15:23 says, *"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and insubordination is as idolatry."* Young people, listen to me, every time you disobey, you dishonor your parents. Every time you break the law, you dishonor your parents. Every time you follow ungodly friends you dishonor your parents. And if *"rebellion is like witchcraft, and insubordination is as idolatry,"* then every time you rebel and become insubordinate you break the first and second of the Ten Commandments as well as the fifth.

In reference to the fifth commandment, Paul said

this "is the first commandment with promise." (Ephesians 6:2). The reason Paul gave is "That it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:3). One thing you can be assured of, if a young person honors his parents by being obedient to them, and to all who are in authority, things will be a whole lot better for that young person. People will respect and admire that child for the godly life he/she lives, and their parents are honored, not only by the child but by all others as well. And if parents will be true, faithful Christians while their children are small, the likelihood of having problems with unruly, insubordinate children will be diminished dramatically. Our Lord Jesus Christ still admonishes children, *"Honor your father and your mother."*

Commandment # 6: (Exodus 20:13)
"You shall not murder."

"Surely," you say to yourself, "everyone knows it is wrong to take another person's life." Can there be any doubt that this commandment is incorporated into the New Testament law of grace? May I remind you that under the New Testament law Jesus teaches that certain sins may well be committed in the heart and condemn a person long before the physical act is done. Listen to the Lord's words found in Matthew 15:18-20.

"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man, for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, ... "

Does Jesus not imply that to harbor the thought of hatred in one's heart is as sinful as murder?

Listen to the inspired words of the apostle John found in 1 John 3:11-15:

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren,

if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

How plain does God have to be? Is there a brother or sister you hate? Is there one against whom you hold a grudge? If so, God's word says you are a murderer. And "You shall not murder," be it the physical act of taking another's life or the spiritual sin of harboring hatred for that brother or sister in your heart. One cannot do this and stand justified in the judgment of Christ. Look at 1 John 2:10-11:

"He who loves his brother abides in the light; and there is no cause of stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

Always keep Exodus 20:20 in mind, "God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." In the person of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, God has come.

Through His sinless life He has given you and me the perfect "example that we should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:20).

Through His death, burial and resurrection He has shed His blood to atone for our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:7).

In our obedience we die to sin, we are buried with him in baptism and are resurrected from the grave of water to "walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-6). That new life of faithfulness unto death will usher us into that heavenly home. (Revelation 2:10; John 14:1-4).

BELIEVING that Jesus is the Son of God; REPENTING of all sins, CONFESSING His blessed name before others, and being BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, we are born into God's spiritual, eternal family. Added to His church.

Have you been buried with Christ? Are you living a faithful life before Him?

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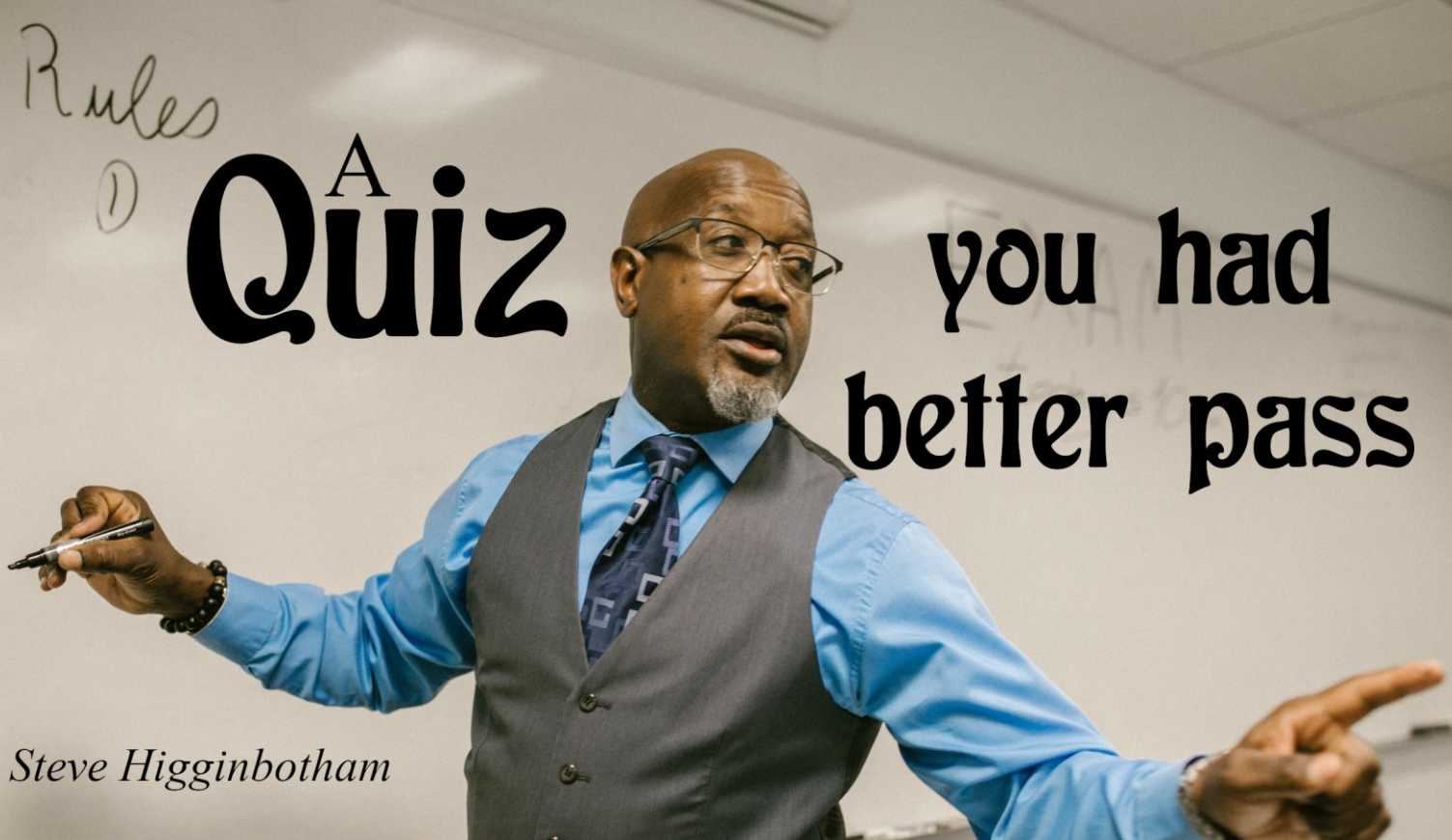


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Steve Higginbotham

True or False – God is a rewarder of those who, with mediocrity, seek him.

Those who know their Bible well, will answer, “False,” recognizing the above statement is a bit of a twist on what Hebrews 11:6 says. What the Bible actually says is God “is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Why then are there so many mediocre Christians? It's not like we haven't been adequately warned.

Consider these explicit passages.

- Lukewarm Christians (another word for mediocre) are sickening to Jesus. Therefore, he counsels them to repent and be zealous (Revelation 3:16, 19).
- We are to seek first, above all things in our lives, the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).
- We must love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).
- The overarching theme of the Sermon on the Mount was that we must possess a “righteousness that exceeds” (Matthew 5:20).
- We must be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14) and “rich in good works” (1 Timothy 6:18).

- We must give diligence to show ourselves approved of God (2 Timothy 2:15).
- And God will reward those who diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

Friends, I don't know how God can make it any clearer. Being a mediocre, nominal, lukewarm Christian is not sufficient to get to heaven. Who says so? Not me, God – right there in black and white.

I'm afraid the body of Christ may consist of a great number of people who are mediocre, nominal, lukewarm Christians. I'm also afraid if we don't remind them, with urgent appeals, many of their souls will be lost.

Friends, the inability to motivate some Christians to take advantage of Bible classes and worship services throughout the week gives me great concern. I understand why some can't, but I'm afraid I also understand why others won't.

Count this as a warning from one who needs to heed it too. Church attendance is not the measure of seeking God with diligence, but one cannot successfully deny that it is an indicator of it.

“All things are ready, come to the feast” (Luke 14:16-24).

FAITH IN PROGRESS

(JOHN 4:42-54)



Stephane Maillet

Many Samaritans (i.e., foreigners, non-Jews) came to believe Jesus was the Restorer they had been waiting for, revealing their genuine faith in the things Christ had spoken to them (John 4:42). However, the Galileans (i.e., sons of the kingdom, Jews, His people) only received Jesus for His signs & wonders. This revealed their superficial faith, as they sought to be sensation-ally entertained (4:44).

There are some similarities between this account (John 4:42-54) and that of the Centurion (a Gentile, Mt. 8:5-13). This Royal Official, most likely a Jew, may very well have been a servant in the court of King Herod. And it would be interesting to note the difference in faith between the Centurion and this Royal Official.

We can understand the account of this father's continuous pleading with Jesus to heal his son. This is his attempt to find hope. Now, he sought

healing from a man he heard could perform signs.

You see, these Galileans, as a people, culture, and community, received Jesus as a man who could perform signs and wonders, but *not* as the Messiah, the Living Son of God, the One capable of leading them to the forgiveness of their sins. The growing change in this Galilean's mind advances him closer to the One who could alleviate his concerns and sorrows.

A difference between the Centurion Gentile and this Jewish Official is this: the Centurion's faith was more robust, for he knew that the mere word of Jesus would suffice. At the same time, the Jew sought to have Jesus in the presence of his son to receive the sign. So we see two examples of faith in various measures and how Christ knew at what level to interact with them.

After Jesus told him his son was healed, we

see this Official's faith grew in the presence of Christ—he took Jesus' word and believed it without imploring him further to come down. His trust in Jesus had risen from that of his initial engagement.

The word of Christ made this man's son alive from certain death. And through a spiritual lens, we understand that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), "for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). For life comes through the living and enduring word of God (1 Peter 1:23). Sin makes us sick. Christ cures us of sickness. And through His Word, we can experience a progression in our faith, resulting in life.

From superficial to genuine trust, a progression of religion took place in this man's life and his family, and it came about through the word of Christ. And for us this day living millennia after the cross, His Word (i.e., the Holy Bible) remains the sole source from which we receive our πίστις (*pistis*, Greek word for "faith").

For our consideration and mediation, why do

we receive Jesus this day, for Who He is, the Word? (John 1:1), or simply because we find some form of vain fulfillment in the Christian religion, a superficial commitment?

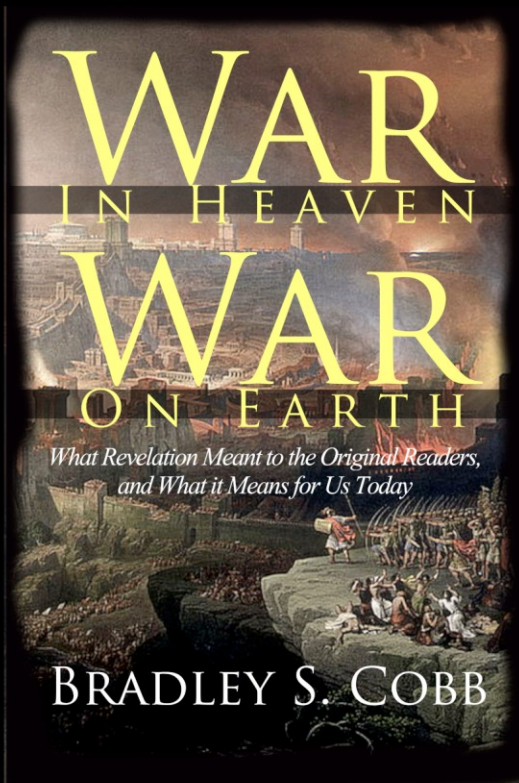
Sadly this is the world we live in; minds have grown dull, seeking Jesus, but doing so in the image of our desires and not of His Word.

Christians who belong to our Master must assemble in His church for His Word, the Truth; Paul would say to Timothy: "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." For this reason, primarily, we "seek first the kingdom of God."

Will the Words of our Master written in the Bible be enough, or do we demand more? Or shall we allow His Word to instruct us into spiritual advancements?

From the first time we began to believe until the moment we obeyed, we grew in our trust for His Word. Such was the case for this Royal Official, resulting in his son fully healed.

Do you *truly* trust in Jesus?



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Matt 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

THINGS GOD HATES:

A Proud Look

Chris Gardner

“These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren”

(Proverbs 6:16-19)

Found written in the book of Proverbs is a section of verses dealing with a very serious topic: “things the LORD hates.” In the sixth chapter (verses 16-19) are listed seven things abominable to God, and which need to be addressed and proclaimed at the highest level in every generation. We must always keep our society in awareness that God has warned us to avoid committing any of these sins. In this article we are going to deal with the first one listed: a proud look.

What is Abominable?

Before we get into discussing what the Bible means by the term “a proud look,” I want to first briefly touch on the gravity of God hating something. When God declares in His Word that He hates something, anyone who fears Him would

do well to take inventory of what that something is. They also would do well to do all they can to avoid such an action in their lives.

The first clue to help us understand how seriously wicked these are is the word “abominable.” I remember an English teacher once saying a lot can be learned from a word by looking to the friends (words) it hangs around (i.e. a word’s synonyms). Abominable hangs around friends like extremely repugnant, offensive, loathsome, and detestable. From this you can see “abominable” carries with it anything but positivity.

In case you need a visual to help you understand how God views things stated as being abominable, picture a landfill with trash heaping up hundreds of feet, taking up a ten-acre lot. Now think about that disgusting smell when that trash is warmed by the sun. Next, pour millions of gallons of raw sewage on top of the trash, and imagine the delightful aroma that brings about. And then for good measure, picture a buzzard on top of all that, puking out regurgitated roadkill and you begin to see the picture of how God views things He calls being abominable. These things are never seen as being good.

To help the reader further understand how vile things are that are categorized as abominable, the Bible also list many others. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 God's Word calls sodomy an abomination. In Deuteronomy there are several other acts that God hates. In Deut. 7:25-26 we are told hold idolatry is abominable to the Lord, the offering up of children as a burnt sacrifice (Deut. 12:31), the offering of any animal to God which contains defects or blemishes (Deut. 17:1), cross-dressing (Deut. 22:5), the offering of a harlot's or male prostitute's wages to God (Deut. 23:18), and the remarrying a wife who had been defiled (Deut. 24:4). So there are many things God found offensive in the Old Testament, and all are still just as offensive and vile to God today—and they need to be avoided. God didn't suddenly change His mind and say, "That thing that used to disgust me, I really kinda like it now!" Once an abomination to God, always an abomination to God.

A Proud Look

Now that we have an understanding on the kind of things God hates, let's examine "a proud look." To help us understand why a proud look is something God finds so detestable, we need to first define what exactly a proud look is. Pride is defined in the dictionary as:

- 1) Satisfaction with self — the happy satisfied feeling somebody experiences when having or achieving something special that other people admire.
- 2) Proper sense of own value — the correct level of respect for the importance and value of your personal character, life, efforts, or achievements
- 3) Feeling of superiority — a haughty attitude shown by somebody who believes, often unjustifiably, that he or she is better than others.
- 4) The source of personal satisfaction— something such as an achievement or possession that somebody feels especially pleased and satisfied with.

As we read here, pride in itself is not sinful for

we all are proud of things and accomplishments in our life. That doesn't make us sinners. For example: I'm a proud father of four children, I'm proud to be a Christian, I'm proud to be an American, and I am proud to be a preacher of God's Word. Just showing pride doesn't make someone a wicked individual, because we all do it with our children, jobs, and lives all the time. We need to look to the original text and see what the Hebrew actually stated to understand what makes a proud look so evil. The word translated "proud" is:

רומ (rûm) pronounced room. A primitive root; to be high, actively to rise or raise (in various applications, literally or figuratively):—bring up, exalt (self), extol, give, go up, haughty, heave (up), etc.¹

The second word, "look"

עין (ayin) (ah'-yin) — probably a primitive word; an eye (literally or figuratively); — affliction, outward appearance...²

When you put the two together, the Hebrew seems to be saying exactly what the American Standard Version reads: "haughty eyes."

That raises the question: What exactly does it mean to have haughty eyes? Matthew Henry wrote in his commentary that the Hebrew phrase was saying that God hates "Haughtiness, conceit- edness of ourselves, and contempt of others — a proud look."³ But sometimes the best way to see what God means is to look at other Scriptures that express a similar idea. "For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks" (Psalm 18:27). The writer of this psalm was David, and he exalts God by proclaiming how God saves the humble, the meek, and the lowly, for He is the One who lifts them up. But

¹ Strong's Hebrew and Greek Definitions (e-Sword).

² Ibid.

³ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible (e-Sword edition)

the person who has haughty eyes (a proud look) exalts themselves, and God brings them down. Another place where this term is found is in Psalm 101:5.

“Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure.”

Again, we read from the psalmist how God goes on the offensive toward those who have this haughty look and proud heart. The reason God is so opposed to it and finds it abominable is that having haughty eyes or a proud look is the exact opposite of what God has taught us from Scripture.

“And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.”

(Psalm 45:4)

“The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, And before honor is humility.”

(Proverbs 15:33)

“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.”

(Proverbs 18:22)

A person cannot be a child of God and have haughty eyes, for when you view yourself as being the pinnacle of whatever pyramid you are climbing, the recognition that should be going to God is lost. God is still far above us in every conceivable way and is the one that must be exalted, praised, and glorified for any and all accomplishments we make.

The main reason why haughty eyes (or a proud look) is so hated by God is that the act is sinful. “A haughty look, a proud heart, And the plowing of the wicked are sin” (Proverbs 21:4). Sin is what separates man from God (Isa. 59:2) and is never anything we should downplay. But when the sin is *abominable* to God as with the ones listed in the Bible, we need to take extra care as to avoid doing them.

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WHY WAS

Paul

CHOSEN?

Johnny O. Trail

Some have wondered why the Apostle Paul was chosen to serve Christ among the many that might have been chosen. Any answer offered might be speculative in nature, but we know Paul was selected by Christ to serve and minister primarily among the Gentile nation. Act 9:15 reveals, “But the Lord said to him [Ananias], “Go, for he [Saul/Paul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” For a moment, one might consider some of the reasons Paul was selected.

Paul might have been chosen due to the powerful testimony he could offer regarding the Messiahship of Christ from one who was a former persecutor. Consider his reputation as offered by Ananias in Acts 9:13-14. “Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” For one so adamantly against Christ and the church to change his mind and behavior, it must have impressed upon many the nature of Paul’s new conviction. This fact made many doubt the sincerity of his conversion (Acts 9.26).

Paul might have been chosen because he was devoted to a task he believed was right and authorized by God—even when he was wrong in his conclusions. It seems Paul was an effective persecutor of the church, because scripture indicates the church grew in number after his conversion to Christ. Imagine what devotion it took for Paul to be held accountable for hindering the growth of the church through his persecutory efforts. Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee,

and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.” Contextually, the “then” in these passages sets up a conditionality that indicates Paul was very effective in thwarting the growth of the church. He was passionate about what he believed to be right but was converted to Christ when he realized the error of his ways (Acts 22.6ff).

Paul might have been chosen because God knew how much he would care about the souls of lost humankind. While Paul expressed concern over lost Jews, his concern stretched to all of humanity. The passages express how much he wanted people to be saved—even to the detriment of his soul. Romans 9:1-3 says, “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.” Another similar passage says, in Romans 10:1, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” If we truly want to be evangelistically minded, we need to love the souls of our fellow man (Mark 10.21).

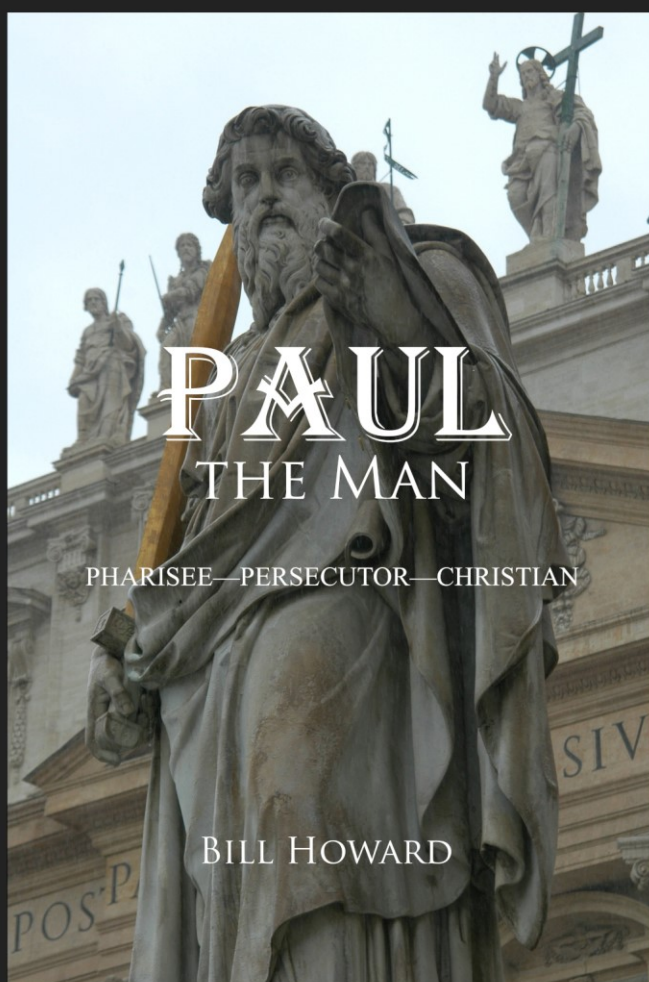
Paul might have been chosen to serve as an Apostle because he was willing to be persecuted and die for what he believed regarding Christ. Acts 21:12-13 says, “Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Not many people have the level of dedication Paul

had. He understood what following Christ truly meant (Luke 9.23).

Paul might have been chosen to work as an Apostle because he demanded and taught the truth even at the loss of human relationships. Galatians 4:15-16 says, “What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” Evidently, the brethren at Galatia loved Paul to the extent that they would have “plucked out” their eyes and given them to Paul if he had desired. It is incredible to consider how much that relationship had changed from complete love and brotherhood to Paul becoming an “enemy” of those teaching and accepting false doctrine. Paul loved the people he engaged in personal evangelism, but he was not willing to compromise

the truth for any person. We should have that same resolve in our Christian walk (Mark 10.34-38).

We will never know this side of Heaven the reasons behind selecting Paul to serve as an Apostle to the Gentiles, but the wisdom of God is undeniable in the effectiveness we see in Paul’s life at promoting the gospel. He saw himself as a debtor because of the grace that was extended to him—even when it was not deserved. Romans 1:14-16 says, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”



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ISLAM

Peeking Behind the Curtain

Chuck Wyeth

In this article we are looking at the of the study Islam and its overall views. We will be looking at the following topics: Why is Islam growing despite its oppressive nature? Why would Muslims choose submission to Allah in all things instead of the true freedom in Christ? How do Muslims view God? And then, what lengths are Muslim people willing to go to advance the cause of Allah? Within each of these questions, I will address the religious, economic, political, and social views of Muslims. I personally have only had brief interactions with a few Muslim people.

I can remember on one occasion my wife Linda and I were at Texas Tech Medical Center, taking our kids to the doctor. We ran into a Muslim woman who was very friendly and answered many of the questions we had for her. I mentioned seeing on a

show on the Travel Channel, where people would invite the host to go to unique locations. I told her one episode was literally about how Muslim people act behind closed doors—the food they eat, what they were like outside the public view. I asked her about the truth behind it, and she laughed and said “yes.” She said she wears jeans under her burka and does her hair and makeup under her hijab as well and flashed her high heels and part of her pantleg of her jeans. She saw her husband walk into the lobby, and stopped talking mid-sentence—and didn’t speak again. This showed us how strict and oppressive he was toward her. Then as soon as he left the lobby she apologized and continued as if she had never quit talking to us. Actually seeing this happen made us realize just how oppressive the Islamic religion is.

Why is Islam growing despite its oppressive Nature?

According to Wissam Youssef, a well-known expert in the study of Islam and a former Muslim, the answer to this question is quite obtuse depending on the direction you look at it. He stated, “Islam is the fastest growing religion by birth, slowest by conversion. Other reasons may include being disenchanted with a Christian individual or community, or an active way of expressing rebellion etc.”¹

For instance, the Malaysian Shi’as population are unable to worship in their own fashion. The Sunnis who are governing the country control everything the Shi’as are doing, claiming the Shiites are bringing trouble and war to the mainly Sunni population. They control publications, newspapers, books and anything most Shi’as see. The Sunnis are even forcing their agenda so much that they are trying to change Sharia Law to only agree with Sunni doctrine specifically. Seeing this type of thing going on proves that oppression exists within Islam. The division and severity exists within its very doctrine and basic moral code. How can a religion within a religion do such outlandish thing to their own people?²

Why would someone choose submission to oppression instead of Freedom in Christ?

When I asked this question of Wisam he responded, “Freedom in Christ implies submission to God (Jas. 4:7). Islam means submission to God. Muslims have a view of God like that of the Jews. God, in Islam, created the heaven and the earth in six days, created Adam and Eve, appeared to Moses in the burning bush etc. However, He is a unit and not a unity (Trinity). He is a creator, a king. He is

eternal, all-good. He is not a Father, and He did not manifest Himself in Christ.”³

To be able to fairly answer this question, we first need to explain why Muslims are so against the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The Muslims feel the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) are fallible, and thus claim they cannot compare to the perfection of the Koran. According to Randall Bush, Christians and Jews have a very similar view of Scripture and its inspiration. However, this especially differs from that of the Muslims. Jews believe the Scripture (namely the Torah) was God’s word to man. Christians also believe both Old and New Testaments came by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those who wrote it. Muslims however believe there are many inconsistencies and changes made. Due to this belief, to them, the current versions of the Bible

are erroneous at best. All three groups have very similar ideas about God and scripture in general. But when it comes down to it, Christians and Jews are at least in the same ballpark, while Islam is playing a whole different type of ballgame.⁴

Christians and Jews are at least in the same ballpark... Islam is playing a whole different type of ballgame.

What lengths are Muslim people willing to go to advance the cause of Allah?

When answering this question, we need to have a proper prospective of what it truly means to follow Allah and the Koran in general. People of the Islamic faith get their teachings from the Koran and the Five Pillars of Islam, which outline proper Muslim behavior and dedication. Earlier, I mentioned Sunni

³ Youssif interview, 2017.

⁴ Bush, R.B., "A tale of two scriptures: Jewish-Christian and Islamic paradigms of scripture and their impact on culture." Christian Scholars Review pg. 309-326. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/201327028?accountid=43702>. (2005)

¹ Personal interview with Wissam Youssef, 2017.

² Musa, August 2013.

versus Shia people. Both are Muslim, both are followers of Shariah Law, both are strict in their understanding of Allah's will according to Mohammed and the Koran. The Koran is for Muslims. But even Muslim people don't agree on what the Koran says. But to be fair, the same goes for Christian and Jewish folks as well.

Now let's talk about what this has to do with advancing the cause of Allah, and what lengths people of Islamic faith are willing to go to in order to make it happen. When I asked this question of Wissam, he answered rather simply, "There are 1.6 billion answers to this question today. Some may die and kill others, other wouldn't do much, and you have all those in between doing what's in between."⁵

It is the obligation of Muslims to battle rebellion against God through jihad. Jihad has two facets. First, it is the battle against temptation and sin for the sake of developing virtue and self-control... The second facet is the battle against any and all who oppose Islam. Some call this second aspect of jihad "holy war." As the famous Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1333–1406) said, "In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the [Muslim] mission and [the obligation to] convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or force." Fighting against non-Muslims is viewed not as an act of aggression but an act of restoration.⁶

Myers goes on to further expand on the idea that more radical Muslims are dismissive toward those who accuse them of being overly aggressive.

An article about some recently elected Muslim women from Minnesota and Michigan shows them lying about their hatred for Israel prior to being elected, and afterwards spewing their hate and desires for Jewish destruction.⁷ At the very least, it

shows that some Muslims are willing to lie (without any qualms) to achieve their desires. It further shows why, in general, people are so untrusting of this religion and their people. Admittedly, many politicians lie to get elected or re-elected. But most politicians don't then openly support the destruction of people based on a religious prejudice.

Some of the things I believed about those of the Islamic faith and its people remain unchanged. However, being able to peek behind the curtain, I see hope that these people could be reached for Christ. We would have to do away with our own prejudices against them, and live in such a way to remove their prejudices towards us. The love of Christ can shine through us and help them leave the religion of oppression for true freedom in Christ.

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⁵ Youssif,

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On Preaching

A Short Treatise

Gantt Carter

What is preaching?

Preaching is both a proclamation (2 Timothy 3:14-4:2), and an explanation of the Scriptures (Nehemiah 8:1-8). This task called preaching is not about giving people what they might want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-5), although it is about sharing good news that strengthens with joy (cf. Nehemiah 8:9-12). It is exposition of the content from God, but also exultation in God. Ministers of the gospel proclaim Jesus, the One who is the “amen” to all Divine promises (2 Corinthians 1:19-20; 4:1-6)!

At its core, preaching is lifting God up through His own words; Christ-centered, not man-centered – exaltation, not entertainment. There is a reason that not only the sermon itself, but the preacher must be soaked in God’s Word and in prayer/praise. Why do we see so many doxologies in the letters of the New Covenant?

Preaching is worship, but it should also drive us to more worship. The Scriptures define our worship, both in its pattern and in its passion. That fact alone means a declaration from those Scriptures will affect our worship, both corporate and private. One wonders if our preaching would benefit from more doxology, regardless of its popularity among the

masses.

Preaching is worship to God, not a performance for men. A sermon is not to make people laugh (although they will likely laugh occasionally), as if it were a standup comedy act. Preaching is not intended to simply play on emotions and serve as a ploy to make people cry. Yes, they may well cry or have their emotions stirred in a sermon, that, however, is not the goal of preaching.

Preaching is not public life coaching or a counseling monologue, but it often will include Biblical counsel for the hearers. A sermon is not meant to merely involve ways to live better or give a list(s) of how to change daily living (a reshaping of the old shall not vs. shall moralism). As the observation goes, the gospel is good news, not good advice – well may the preacher and the listener keep that reminder in mind.

A sermon is not a motivational speech or pep-talk, but sermons should be motivational. Is there anything more motivating than Jesus and His work?

Heralding for Jesus is not giving a lecture or a technical speech, but these proclamations certainly include facts and information for the recipients to learn and to believe. Effective preaching (with vari-

ation from sermon to sermon) engages our intellectual side and touches our emotional side.

Concluding thoughts/questions

Areas of analysis for sermons:

- Was the Word preached?
- How much was the good news about Jesus present, at least as an underlying reality?
- Did the sermon exalt God?

Do we live in a society allergic to the truth, perhaps even to the very concept of truth? Should we keep preaching? Is preaching, even as a form of communication, still relevant in the 21st century? Then again, were things all that different in Paul's day?

If anything, living in a time when feelings alone dictate rightness for many and God "speaking" is

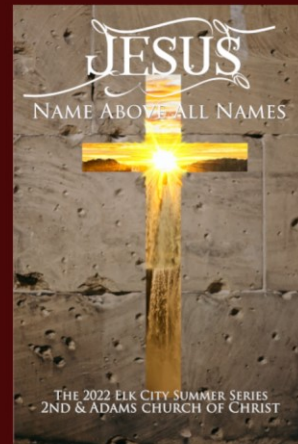
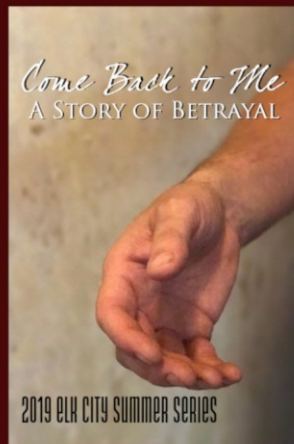
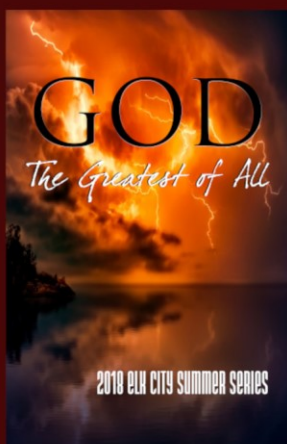
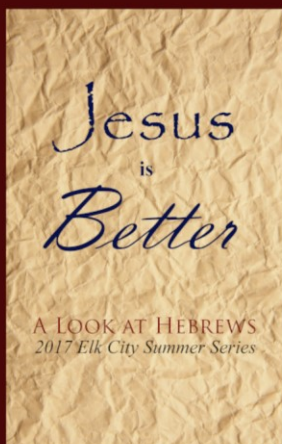
perceived as distinctive from His Word, we need to hear the Word of God more than ever (Acts 13:44). We need sermons that will challenge our thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:1-6; 11:1-1-6) and comfort our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:13-5:5). We need listeners who wish to see Jesus (to borrow from John 12:20-21), and then proclaimers who will do just that, give them Jesus. We must proclaim the whole counsel of God, and we cannot do that without Jesus as the center (Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 5:37-40); everything else for us is tightly tethered to Him. We

preach "Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8; 22:13) – how well does our preaching mesh with that reality?

*At its core, preaching is lifting God
up through His own words;
Christ-centered, not man-centered –
exaltation, not entertainment.*

"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD" (Jeremiah 22:29).

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GROWING IN LOVE

Roy Knight

As Jesus hung upon the cross and looked down into the masses, He saw many souls who considered His life as nothing. There were the soldiers who had scourged Him and led Him out to be crucified. Later, other soldiers would sit around the cross, casting lots for His garments. To them the clothes were worth more than the man hanging on the cross, staring down at them. There were the Jews who blasphemed and mocked Him, saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:40, NKJV). Even the thieves could not resist a jab at Him. Yet, in all this hostility and apathy Jesus looked down upon them and said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Stephen, as he stood before the high priest, false accusers, and those of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, recounted the history of the Jewish nation. He

implored them to turn from their wicked ways unto God. Refusing to hear his messages of salvation, they gnashed at him with their teeth, carried him outside the city and stoned him to death. In the midst of this hatred, he “cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60).

how can I grow in love towards my fellow brethren who rub me the wrong way?

Paul, sitting in bondage in a Roman prison, cold and mistreated, refused to entertain the root of bitterness towards the venomous Jews and the apathetic Romans. Instead, Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more

and more in knowledge and all discernment...” (Phil. 1:9). In his Ephesian letter, Paul wrote, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us...” (5:1-2).

How is it possible to grow in love towards those who mistreat you and despise that Name you con-

sider most holy? Still too, how can I grow in love towards my fellow brethren who rub me the wrong way? How can I grow in love towards my spouse when things are less than ideal? How can I grow in love towards my kids when I am overwhelmed with the responsibilities of life?

The answer is this: We must learn to see souls through the eyes of God. We must remember that God created mankind in His image. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” We appreciate those things that are close to us perhaps more than things that belong to others. We appreciate our own children and grandchildren more than others. Why? Because they “belong” to us and are a part of us. Though hard to fathom, all souls belong to God, every soul is precious to Him just as much as our children and grandchildren are precious to us.

God’s love is so great and vast that He desires every soul to be saved. Jesus said, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). “The world” in this verse refers to every single soul upon this terrestrial ball, no matter color, ethnic group, economic status, educational level, etc....

Peter wrote “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The words “any” and “all” refer to every soul upon this planet. There is not a single soul that He wants to perish. God wants to fill up heaven with every soul possible. When we begin to see souls the way God sees them, our love for souls will begin to grow the way it should.

Here is something else for us to consider: God loves people no matter what kind of sin they are in.

We need to understand that since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), we all fall under the same condemnation. Many of us have escaped that condemnation by being in Christ (Romans 8:1), yet many others have not. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, gives a list of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God,

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Yet even in sin, God’s love throws out the saving message of the gospel for all to cling to and be saved. The following verse shows the result of true repentance. Paul wrote, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified,

but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11). How was this transformation

possible? Because

someone began to see souls through the eyes of God. Someone began to love souls the way God loves souls.

When we begin to see people, see souls, the way God does, we will take the words of Jude 1:22-23 seriously, “And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

We will manifest the love Jesus did from the cross, as Stephen did as he was being stoned, and as Paul did as he sat in prison, when and only when we begin to see souls through the eyes of God. Here is the question: Are you truly striving to see the lost, the brethren, your spouse, and your children through the eyes of God?

We must learn to see souls through the eyes of God.

The Tree

Adam Cozort

A tree was planted in a well-watered plain. When it was first planted it was small and weak. The one who planted it placed supports around it to help hold it up and allow its roots to grow and work their way deep into the ground. This gave the tree the support it needed to withstand the winds that passed through the plain.

As time progressed, the tree grew tall and strong. Its roots ran deep and wide around its base. It blossomed and grew with a beauty that caused those passing by to admire it. It became a source of shade that people sought out on a hot day, and it became beloved by children who would climb into its branches.

It withstood storms, floods, and high winds because of its deep roots and strong foundation. While occasionally a branch would be broken or a scar cut into its bark, the tree remained strong and beautiful for generations to recognize and enjoy.

The picture of this beautiful tree is the symbol the psalmist uses to describe the follower of God when he wrote by inspiration: “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither and whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:3).

Christianity is designed to bring us to a place of maturity, like spiritual trees planted by God. Early on we need help, unable to face everything on our own, but with the Lord and our fellow Christians stabilizing us, we can grow strong and deep roots.

We will face trials and adversity, but as we grow our abilities, confidence, and strength continue to grow as well (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-3). If we develop the fruit God desires to see in us (2 Peter

1:5-8), we will be those who provide comfort, strength, encouragement, joy, and security for those around us.

Above all, we must remember the source of our strength as spiritual trees. It is not from our own strength that we are sustained, but in the power of the Lord. In the prior verse the psalmist reminds us that the blessed man’s delight, “is in the Law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). The source of our growth and strength comes from the Lord and the watering of His Word. Paul wrote that he planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). Yet, even the planting and watering done by these two first century preachers was not from their own wisdom, but by means of the Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-2).

God does not make comparisons lightly, nor does He make statements about His people that are untrue. Therefore, when you look at one of those strong, beautiful trees that dot the landscape of His creation, remember what He wants you to be, what you can become, and how to get there.



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GROWING

By the Word

Noah Wall

In 2 Peter 3:18, we are commanded to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Growing requires a source of nourishment. Thankfully, Peter has already informed us about this source. In 1 Peter 2:2, we can read that God’s Word is this source of nourishment. Whether physically or spiritually, when we receive a source of nourishment, three steps are required for that source to produce growth.

1. Ingest
2. Digest
3. Manifest

Ingest

Why is it important for us to ingest God’s Word? Because a lack of knowledge can lead to destruction. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). How do we ingest God’s Word?

To ingest God’s Word, we must properly value it. “...I have treasured the words of His mouth, More than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). We must value God’s Word enough to be more concerned about receiving the spiritual nourishment it provides than receiving our most necessary food.

To ingest God’s Word, we must make time for it. “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things...” (Psalm 119:37). Why does David pray

this? The entire context of Psalm 119 is about knowing and keeping God’s law. If we truly desire to learn and keep the law of God, we won’t waste our time absorbing worthless things.

We ingest God’s Word by firmly placing it in our hearts. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). This is done by reading God’s Word daily (Deuteronomy 17:19).

Digest

Why is it important to go on to this step? Well, because it is possible to be familiar with what God’s Word says and still entirely miss the meaning of it. “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him” (Acts 13:27). Although the rulers at Jerusalem read from the prophets every week, they didn’t recognize Jesus, who was the fulfillment of those prophecies. In Matthew 22:29-32 Jesus reprimanded the Sadducees for “not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Although they knew what the passage under consideration said, Jesus pointed out they had ignored the tense of a word which contained a profound teaching about the resurrection.

How do we avoid making this mistake? As we

noticed from the Sadducees, we must pay close attention to the details. This requires much diligence. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Rightly dividing God's Word doesn't happen by accident. It requires a lot of time and energy. In Psalm 119:147-148 David speaks of rising before light and staying up late at night to pray and meditate on God's Word. The Christian life does not require a college degree, but it does require a strong work ethic, both in our study and in the application of what we learn.

Manifest

As essential as it is to read and study God's Word, if we don't allow it to change our lives it will do us no lasting good. "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:15). God wants

to see progress in our lives, and he wants others to be able to see it as well. In James 1:21-25 James writes, "be doers of the word and not hearers only." He goes on to say that hearing and not doing is like looking in a mirror and walking away without changing the things that so badly need corrected. We must not only read and study God's word. We must also apply it to our lives so that it will be manifest in the way we live.

Conclusion

Do you love God enough to read, study, and exemplify His Word in every aspect of your life? Are you willing to dedicate the time and energy required to mold your life to his perfect will? If not, why not?

As Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, "What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

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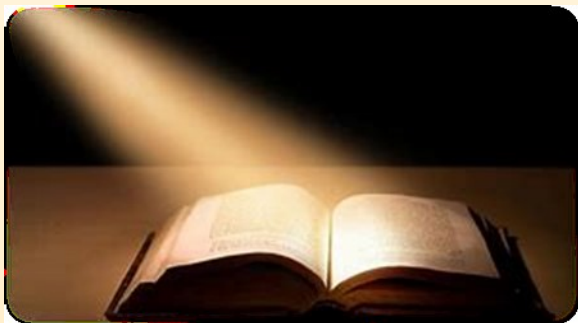
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The Wise Men

THE REST OF THE STORY

Stanley Sherman

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all of Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.””

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the

child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold the star that they had seen when it rose went before them and came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.”

Matthew 2:1-12, ESV

The Greek word for “wise men” is *magoi*, [“Magi” as used in the NASV Bible] and referred to priests and experts in mysteries. In spite of the well-known Christmas carol, *We Three Kings of Orient Are*, the Magi were not kings. The word *magi* comes

from the tribe of their origin, the Magi. They lived in the region of the Medes and Persians, which region in our day and time would have reached from Turkey to Afghanistan, comprising modern day Iraq, Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Medes and Persians eventually conquered the Babylonian Empire. Most likely the wise men were Iranians and probably would have learned of the Messiah from the Jews who had been in Babylonian captivity.

From the word *magi* we get the word *magic*. The Magi claimed to know the future through the study of astronomy, the study of the position of stars and planets. And, they actually had more accurate charts, graphs, and maps than were available anywhere else in the world in that day and time. However, they also moved in to astrology, not scientific, believing future events could be discerned from the position and alignment of the stars and planets. They further believed they could interpret dreams, and through combining dreams and astrology could thus predict the future. So, also, from *magi* we get the word *magistrate*. In addition, the magi were philosophers, rulers, or men of great nobility.

When men of great rank made long journeys, they took their servants and many soldiers along with them, especially if they were carrying precious gifts of jewelry, gold or other forms of wealth, to protect the entourage from bandits along the treacherous routes. A great number of camels to carry provisions and servants to tend and feed the animals and travelers. So, the popular idea that there were only three wise men is debatable, although three would still have servants.

Now think of the distance the Magi group with servants and soldiers would have to travel. From Babylon to Jerusalem was a distance of 1677.7 miles as the crow flies. Traversing the trade routes through the treacherous mountain passes would make the distance longer. Camels could have only traveled 18 or 19 miles a day. Thus, the trip probably would take several months. When you factor in that the Magi rode while the servants walked, and between set up for camping and take down every day, rest time and places to re-supply provisions, it

would take several months—an incredibly long time. And, remember that travel in that day was incredibly risky.

Another evidence of a large group traveling together is the attention they received as they entered Jerusalem—even the attention of King Herod. Had there only been three, their entry into Jerusalem would not have attracted much attention. Herod “was troubled and *all* Jerusalem with him” [Matthew 2:3].

By the time the Magi arrived the child Jesus was two years old and living with his parents in a house in Bethlehem. This is quite different from the popular Christmas manger scene display of the baby Jesus in the manger surrounded by the shepherds, Mary and Joseph and three kings bearing gifts in their hands.

“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.”

Matthew 2:11

Just to interject some interesting information on the gifts of the Magi—spicy smelling frankincense and myrrh are sap drawn from the *Boswellia sacra* and *Commiphora* trees, respectively, both from the same botanical family. These trees grow on the Arabian peninsula and in India and northeastern Africa. Frankincense, also known as *olibanum*, was often burned as incense, while myrrh made its way into medicine and perfume. In ancient times these saps were worth just as much as gold. The third item was gold. It would probably be seen as Providential that the value of these gifts could provide the financial means for the family to escape to Egypt to avoid Herod's vendetta to destroy the child, Jesus, as a perceived threat to his future legacy. They would reside in Egypt for the next six years until the death of Herod.

“And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country another way. Now when they had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Jo-

seph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'out of Egypt I called my son' ...Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old and under."

Matthew 2:12-16

This is where the Biblical account of the Magi's visit ends, however it is not the end of their story, nor of their future association with the Christ. When the Eunuch of Ethiopia in Acts 8 went on his way rejoicing back to his home to Africa after his baptism, historical evidence shows a growth of Christianity developing in Ethiopia in the years following that event. And do you believe that Magi could not have excitedly related to their families, friends, and acquaintances all of what they had experienced in Israel back in their homeland?

AND NOW THE REST OF THE STORY

To access this very interesting story we must go to Karachi, Pakistan back in 1965, where at that time J.C. and Betty Choate were missionaries. Here is their account of the incident:

"Recently a man stopped at our gate here in Karachi, and stood looking up at the sign 'Church of Christ'. After a few minutes he came inside the gate and rang the doorbell. We invited him in, and an amazing conversation followed.

Dr. A.S. Kahn is originally from Iran. He said he was checking out the sign that identified us as the church of Christ, wondering if he would be able to fellowship us. We had never been under such an investigation, so we were very interested in what Dr. Khan had to say. His first astounding statement was that there are approximately 750,000 people in the area of Azerbaijan, and extending on up into Russia, in a very mountainous region along the

common border of the two countries, who claim to be just Christians!

My wife and I had subsequent meetings with this gentleman and have been even more thrilled with what we have heard. This past week we sat with Dr. Khan for some time and questioned him extensively concerning this group and their practices. We were amazed at the answers he gave. We deliberately did not tell him what we believed until we had the opportunity to hear what he had to say. On the basis of what was discussed, it appears that these people and the American churches of Christ are very close indeed.

Dr. Khan talked at length to give us the background of which he is still a part. He said that this group of people dates back to the birth of Christ. The 'Wise Men', from what has now come to be called Iran, saw the star and followed it, ultimately finding the baby King. They stayed for a while and then returned to Iran by a different route.

Heard Peter At Pentecost

About 25 years later, when the child would have become a man, a group of 25 men made a trip to Israel to see what had become of the one they had worshiped as the new King of Israel. They remained for several years and were present on the day of Pentecost to hear Peter's sermon. After that they came home.

Later, another group made a trip to that part of the world. They also spent several years, with the last part of the time being in Antioch. When they returned home, they brought with them a book containing *'The Sayings of Christ'*, which Dr. Kahn says corresponds closely with the writings in the present day New Testament.

Dr. Kahn explained that the faith of these people has been handed down from father to son through the years, and that they have not changed. He said that although he has traveled a great deal and has searched for others with like faith, he has not left his original beliefs.

Persecution Hindered Evangelism

As to being evangelistic, they have not been, other than to teach the truths to their own children, because of persecution. First, they were persecuted by the Catholics, then by the Arme-

nians, then by the Muslims. So they have remained to themselves through the centuries, living in a mountainous area. Although they call themselves Christians, they are known by the government as 'the Nazarenes' even to this day.¹

They Are "Christians Only"

This body of people, according to Dr. Kahn believes that Christ established the church and that all other churches or denominations are the anti-Christ. They look to Christ as the head of the church, with no earthly head or headquarters. They are Christians only. They meet each Sunday for worship, having the Lord's Supper, prayer, Bible study, singing (vocal music only), and giving.

When asked how many come together for worship in his home congregation, he said 5000. He said that there are numerous assemblies with two to three hundred to two to five thousand meeting for worship. Each congregation is independent and has its own elders. They also have a program for the education of their children, providing three hours a week of Bible training in addition to what they receive on Sunday. The women do not preach or teach publicly but they do teach the children and other women.

Dr. Kahn told us that although they believe in immersion (for adults only) they immerse three times, once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit. They recognize Easter and Christmas, but both at the same time, on March 4th. They believe that Christ was born and resurrected on the same date. On that day they have a gathering and a sermon on the resurrection.

With the exception of these points, we found no differences. There probably are others, but it is amazing to run across someone in this part

of the world with such a background. We concluded that there must be something to his story, for he knows a very pure New Testament Christianity, and in every way speaks as the oracles of God, without denominational jargon. In these years of living on this side of the world, we have never talked or studied with anyone who, from the beginning, had such a clear understanding of the Truth.

Being cautious, we asked ourselves what he had to gain if he was trying to deceive us. He asked us for no money, and he offered to go with me to his home. I was eager to do this, and we discussed potential timing. As it turned out, he was out of Karachi at the only time that I could work such a trip into my schedule (we moved to Sri Lanka shortly thereafter) so I decided to visit brethren who were stationed in Teheran in the American military, and to go from there alone into the part of the country where these Christians were supposed to be.

I did that, traveling by car as far as was possible. From that point, the way into the mountains was only by horseback, and I decided I could not make that trip alone. It was a great disappointment that I was not able to trace the story to a proven conclusion. However, the people with whom I talked at the stopping point did tell me that there used to be many Christians in that area, but because of persecution they had moved into the mountains, which was also what Dr. Khan had said.

Perhaps someday, conditions in Iran will again be such that someone can investigate this story fully. Knowing how many scams there are in the world, my skeptical human nature listened in doubt. Yet, every time I recall the detailed biblical truths Dr. Khan spoke in those visits, I am convinced all over again that there must have been historical truth in his story, too." [The late J.C. Choate (1932-2008) in *The Voice of Truth International* Volume 57]

¹ Nazarene is a title used to describe people from the city of Nazareth in the New Testament (there is no mention of either Nazareth or Nazarene in the Old Testament), and is a title applied to Jesus, who, according to the New Testament, grew up in Nazareth, a town in Galilee, now in northern Israel. [Stanley Sherman]



1 CORINTHIANS 2

A new translation and commentary

Matthew Shaffer

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come preaching the mystery of God according to my superiority in speech or wisdom, for I did not deem it wise to know anything among you except for Jesus Christ – and Him as crucified. I became to you as one who was weak, in fear, and in much trembling, and my logic and my message did not consist of persuasive words of wisdom, but rather of proof regarding the Spirit and power, so that your faith may not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

But we do speak wisdom among those who have matured, though it is not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are being made void. Rather, we speak God’s hidden wisdom in a mystery, which God appointed before the ages began to accomplish our glory. Not one of the rulers of the age has understood this, for if they did understand, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. But

rather, as it is written:

‘No eye has seen these things, nor has any ear heard them,

Nor have they sprung into the heart of man –

The things that God has prepared for those who love Him.’

But God has revealed them to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit examines everything, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of any man, except for the spirit of that man that is in him? Likewise, no one has understood the thoughts of God, save for the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but rather the Spirit which is from God, so that we may know the things which God has given to us by His grace. And we do not express these thoughts with words taught by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things. A man devoid of spirituality does not accept

the things taught by God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to understand, because they are discerned spiritually. The spiritual man, however, discerns all of what is taught, and he himself cannot be discerned by any other, for 'who understands the mind of the Lord, so that he will teach Him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

Translation Notes

1: "*Preaching the mystery of God...*" – Most translations (NASB, NKJV, ESV, NIV) have here the "testimony" of God instead of His "mystery." This is based on a manuscript difference. According to the editors of the Greek text I am using – the 28th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*¹ – "mystery" is the most likely early reading. There is a place to investigate the textual criticism of this passage, but I do not see that it has a significant impact on the meaning in this place. Therefore, I have translated it according to the Greek text before me.

3: "*I became to you...*" – Most translations have either "I was with you..." (NASB, NKJV, ESV) or "I came to you" (NIV, NRSV). The Greek word *γίνομαι* (ginomai) embraces all three meanings, to a greater or lesser degree². Since Paul made a determination not to know any wisdom or strength among them, it would make sense that he "became" weak. He makes it clear in the next paragraph (v. 6) that he was capable of dealing in wisdom with those who were prepared to receive it, but this was not his starting point. He chose to be weak so that the gospel could be glorified.

4: "*My logic and my message...*" – See my comments on my translation of 1:18, "the logic of

the cross," in the first issue of this paper.

14: "*A man devoid of spirituality...*" – This is a difficult phrase to translate, partly because it sets up a theme that will appear again in 1 Corinthians 15:44-46. In this verse and the next, the Greek words *ψυχικός* (psychikos) is contrasted with the word *πνευματικός* (pneumatikos), often translated "natural" and "spiritual," respectively (e.g., NASB, NKJV, ESV). The latter is the adjectival form of the noun *πνεῦμα* (pneuma), "spirit," while the former holds the same relationship to the word *ψυχή* (psyche), "soul." Thus, Paul appears to contrast a man who is led by his "soul" with one who is led by a "spirit" (whether his own or God's).

Understandably, this is a difficult concept to work through, especially since we often use the words "soul" and "spirit" interchangeably in modern English. The concept of spirit can be understood easily in the context – Paul has appealed to the human spirit as the rational consciousness that dwells in a human body ("who knows the thoughts of any man, except for the spirit of that man that is in him?"), and he has spoken of the Spirit of God in the same way – as a rational consciousness who has full access to God's deepest thoughts and communicates them to humanity. Thus, when Paul speaks of a spiritual man in verse 15, he is referring to someone who has been taught to discern things on a spiritual level – with words and concepts taught by God's Spirit.

But what of the "soulish" or "soul-led" man? Regarding the soul, Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich are reluctant to "draw hard and fast lines in the use of this multivalent word³." Sometimes it has reference simply to animal life, sometimes to something greater, perhaps even eternal life (e.g., 1 Thesalonians 5:23). However, the same authors are willing to limit the meaning of *ψυχικός* (psychikos) to the physical, animal world, in that it pertains "to the life of the natural world and whatever belongs to it, in contrast to the realm of experience whose central

¹ Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28. revidierte Auflage, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). Logos.

² Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). 196-199. Logos.

³ Ibid., 1098.

characteristic is *πνεῦμα*⁴ (spirit). This would indicate that the man who cannot discern spiritual things is in this condition because of the absence of spirituality, not because something else has been introduced.

In other words, the spiritual man is not fundamentally different in his nature from the natural man. Rather, he has both physical, animal life *and* spiritual understanding. By contrast, the natural man only understands what happens in the physical world, for he neither believes nor understands the things that pertain to the spirit. As long as his reasoning and knowledge are based *solely* on the physical world, he will never understand what the Spirit of God has to say. This is the view expressed in the NRSV.

Spiritual Wisdom: ***Comments on 1 Corinthians 2***

Introduction

In the first chapter, Paul established the only practical grounds for Christian unity. If we want to grow together into the same mind and purpose, we must abandon every influence that divides us – that elevates any group above another – and submit ourselves to God’s direction. For this reason, God chose to save us through the crucifixion of Christ, something so unexpected and irrational that no human philosopher or mighty warrior would claim it as a victory. To the contrary, the gospel demands that Christians give up their faith in human wisdom and human strength. These will accomplish nothing, only the foolishness of the cross can save.

But this does not mean that there is no wisdom or strength to be found in the gospel, only that they are of a different nature from the wisdom and strength that we perceive in the world around us. God’s Word does not only appeal to our emotions – to tell us how to feel or react to Christ’s work – He also appeals to our rational minds. There is much that we can know and teach once we learn how to discern

them spiritually. This is what Paul sets out to prove in 1 Corinthians 2.

1-5

In the first verses of the chapter, Paul explains the program he adopted when he first preached in Corinth and, more importantly, why he preached that way. He emphasizes that he did not preach the mystery of God according to his “superiority in speech or wisdom.” If anyone in the early church could appeal to his own learning and authority, it would have been Paul. He had a fortuitous upbringing, including an education under one of the most highly respected elders of Israel in his day, and his conduct under the Law of Moses was as blameless as anyone could be (Acts 22:1-5; Philippians 3:2-6). Surely he knew how to deliver an impressive speech that would evoke an emotional response from the audience, or how to form a forceful argument that an opponent could not easily resist. Nevertheless, he refused to do either of these things in Corinth. He denied himself the right to use his own natural advantages.

Instead, he presented himself to the Corinthians as one who was weak and fearful, who had only one message to preach – the crucifixion of Christ. The only evidence that he offered to support this message was proof that God’s Spirit was working with him – probably miraculous signs such as healing and speaking in foreign languages that he could not otherwise have known. All that these demonstrations would or could do is prove that Paul was supported by the strength of God. His message itself was not impressive, because the idea that Christ had conquered His enemies through a cross was foolish to the Greek world.

But Paul determined to use only this proof, and to preach only this message, so that the Corinthians who did believe would believe in the right thing. He needed to convince them to believe in God’s power and not to rely on Paul for anything. If someone in Corinth was converted only because of Paul’s ability to argue for Christ or to disprove the power of idols, he would not begin his Christian walk with the right focus. In fact, he might rather look down

⁴ Ibid., 1100.

on any other teachers who did not share Paul's eloquence. He would become a convert of Paul, not a convert of the Spirit of God. Paul wanted to minimize the possibility that his personality would be the driving force behind *anyone's* conversion. Therefore, he actively drew their attention away from himself and his strengths to focus on God and His strength.

6-9

The fact that Paul's initial message, which the Christians at Corinth had believed, was so simple did not mean that there was no depth to the gospel. Once a Christian has faith in the power of God, and once he has matured into the next stage of his life in Christ, then it is appropriate for him to focus on wisdom once again. But this is a different kind of wisdom than we will encounter in the world around us. God's wisdom appears foolish to the world, and likewise, it is not possible to use worldly wisdom, the "wisdom of this age," to accomplish the purpose of God's kingdom. Only God's wisdom can do this. Thus, we discuss His "hidden wisdom in a mystery."

This does not mean that God's wisdom is hidden from those of us who are in Christ – only that His wisdom is a mystery to those who are accustomed to relying on worldly strength or intelligence. The proof that Paul offers of this proposition is that the rulers of the world accomplished God's mission when they thought they were fighting against Him. The cross seemed so shameful to them, so foolish that the Son of God could not possibly use it to overcome the strength of the world. However, if they had understood God's plan, they would never have killed Him. They would never have allowed Him to defeat their greatest weapon – death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

But it was necessary that things happen this way so that God could fulfil His purpose in the church. God appointed the logic that would save us in Christ before time began in order to "accomplish our glory." He hid the things that He has prepared for those who love Him so that they could neither be anticipated by those who would follow Him, nor denied

by those who would oppose Him. Thus, he destroyed the wisdom of wise men, and refused the understanding of those who understand.

10-12

But these things have not remained hidden for eternity. God does want us to understand His wisdom and His purpose. But because this kind of wisdom belongs to God and not to humanity, He must teach it to us. We have to learn how to think like God. This is the mission of God's Spirit. The Spirit knows the deep thoughts of God, and He has carried them to us.

Paul explains why we must yield to God's Spirit by analogy. There are things completely hidden in the world around us to the point that no wisdom, science, or strength can uncover them. Specifically, there is no way for any human to know what another human is thinking or feeling. I cannot see your thoughts, nor can you see mine. The only one who has access to these things is the spirit, the rational consciousness, who dwells in each human individually. I can tell you what I think, because my spirit controls my thoughts, my speech, and my actions, but you can only know my thoughts if I *reveal* them to you. Likewise, God has thoughts and feelings, and these are shared with His Spirit. His Spirit is also responsible for revealing His wisdom to those who are outside, for if His Spirit did not tell us, we would never be able to discover what God thinks or feels.

Therefore, when Paul says that "we did not receive the spirit of the world, but rather the Spirit which is from God," he merely intends to demonstrate that the things revealed by the Spirit *are* God's thoughts. The Spirit did not come from the world, so He will not teach worldly wisdom. Thus, through Him, and only through Him, can we know "the things which God has given to us by His grace."

13-16

If God's Spirit has taught us things that cannot be discovered in the physical world, it follows that we will be unprepared to comprehend them or describe

them the same way that we might describe a worldly subject. Thus, we use words or descriptions taught to us by the Spirit. It *is* possible to express these things in human language – Paul is clear that this is the medium the Spirit has used – but we have to learn a new method of reasoning before we can talk about them sensibly.

If someone is “devoid of spirituality,” one who has not learned to reason as the Spirit of God reasons, he will find that the things taught by God’s Spirit are irrational and gibberish. He will favor the strength and wisdom of the present age because these things make sense to his way of thinking. A spiritual reward is not worth pursuing, because he cannot comprehend its significance.

However, those who are spiritual, who have learned how to reason like God’s Spirit, are able to comprehend all of what has been revealed to us. They have learned to use God’s wisdom, and Paul goes so far as to say that they are no more comprehensible to the world than God is: “he himself cannot be discerned by any other.” This argument, as well as the quote from Isaiah 40:13, are meant to show that, when we adopt the incomprehensible wisdom of God that is hidden from the world, our

own wisdom and reasoning will cease to make sense to those around us. They will not be able to understand our hope nor our motivations, nor will they be in a position to critique or to guide us. Human wisdom is completely powerless when compared to the wisdom of God. Thus, insofar as we have learned the knowledge of Christ, and how to think like Him, we have been given His mind.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 2 teaches us that there is wisdom behind God’s actions, but it is a different kind of wisdom than we can find in the world. If we wish to grow together in unity, we must strip away any reliance we have on the wisdom of the world and submit ourselves as the students of God’s Spirit, who has revealed His Word to us. When we learn to reason like the Spirit, we will adopt the same understanding and the same purpose as God Himself shares. This is the one mind and one purpose that Paul appealed to in 1 Corinthians 1:10. When we learn to think like God, we will leave behind the wisdom of the world, and become as He is.

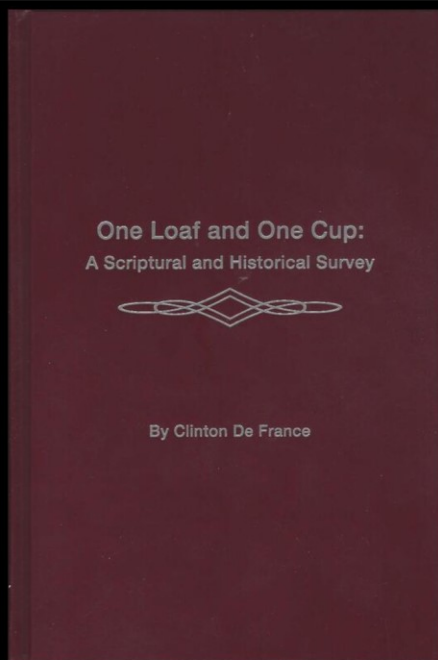
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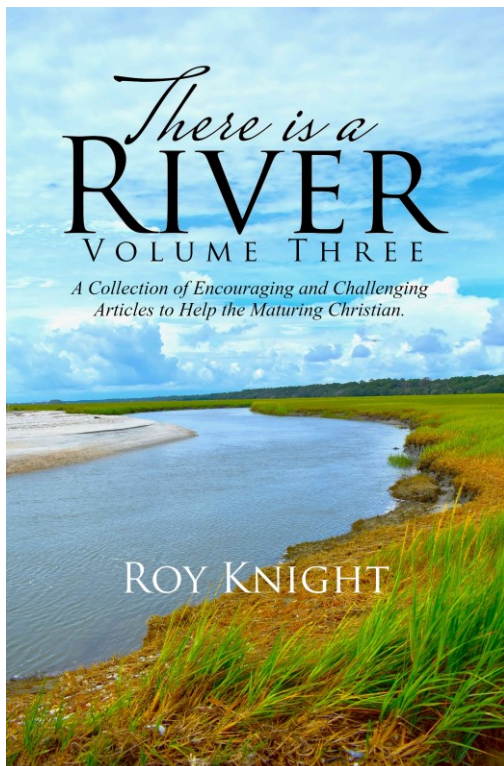
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CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Mark Tabata

It is written:

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

(Joel 2:32)

The Bible tells us that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). Many teach that this is a reference to a sinner (a non-Christian) praying to God to be saved (i.e., the sinner’s prayer). This is not the meaning, which is clear for several reasons.

First, if the people on Pentecost understood this phrase to be a reference to the sinner’s prayer, then they would not have needed a few verses later to ask what to do to be saved (Acts 2:37). They would have already known the answer to that question! This shows they didn’t understand “calling on the name of the Lord” to be a reference to the sinner’s prayer.

Second, this phrase was used throughout the Old

Testament as a generic phrase that simply meant to obey what God says to do.

For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, That they all may call on the name of the LORD, To serve Him with one accord.
(Zephaniah 3:9)

Third, they were told how to call on the name of the Lord by Peter in Acts 2:38.

“Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Finally, even though Paul had been praying a “sinner’s prayer” for three days and nights (Acts 9:9-11), he still had not “called on the name of the Lord” until he was baptized.

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

(Acts 22:16).

Have you called upon the name of the Lord?

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

John Krivak

Humans conspired with unseen forces to crucify Jesus. And to anyone later in history, Nazi Germany represents another absolute marriage of evil between unseen spiritual forces and human beings. It is Satan and Hitler, working together. It would be wrong to limit the sheer wickedness to either the Fuhrer or to the Devil. How could anyone not see the entire Nazi terror as Satanic?

We can feel them, sense their presence, see their working in the shifting flow of world events. These monstrous beings, whoever they are, operate at the highest levels of organized evil. Mere demons focused their efforts narrowly on individual people. Their rather small aim was “possession,” a parasitic occupation of one person at a time. Not *these* powers; they drive larger strategies that impact entire civilizations. These malevolent forces also are not to be identified with Satan himself. The satanic powers surely ally with Satan, and obey him. But while the devil is a single being, these are spoken of in plurality. Who are they?

It is Paul who pulls back the veil on the unseen realm and reveals them to us. He refers to them with combinations of several terms: principalities, rulers, powers, authorities, thrones, and dominions (to simplify, I will usually just call them principalities). Paul does not explain them in detail. Likely, he discussed these powers in his epistles with people who already believed in their existence. Some of their beliefs may reflect popular pagan notions. Of course, many then-popular ideas were wrong (as are some now-popular ideas). For example, some ancients connected the principalities to astrology. But Paul never writes off the entire discussion of them as empty superstition. The powers are real.

Paul addresses the principalities in several places. We will order these writings in a logical sequence that starts with Colossians and Ephesians. Here we find a rather surprising statement about the origin of these beings:

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16–17, NASB).

The world forces of evil were created by Jesus, and for Jesus! We know also that Jesus—co-creator with God the Father—created Satan, according to this simple logic: “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). Yet there is found here no duality of equally matched powers of good and evil; God created the principalities and therefore He may claim supremacy over them. Still, the Creator has no complicity with the evil that characterizes these beings. Even the enemies of God play into His redemptive purpose (as Pharaoh did against Moses).

Colossians and Ephesians credit Jesus with reunifying the broken Creation that was fragmented by Satan and by sin. Through the Cross, Jesus reconciles all things and brings peace—things both in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:20). A prime example, the Cross brings the Law’s removal, which enables Jews and Gentiles to unify in Christ (Eph. 2). Such repair undoes and reverses the earlier work of Satan and the principalities. The actual defeat of the evil powers was won by the Cross:

“...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [or, through it—the Cross]” (Colossians 2:14–15).

The Resurrection plays a large role also. This was not merely the return to life by a corpse. For Jesus—it was that, followed by fantastic exaltation to

power, to glory, to unrivaled authority at the right hand of the throne of God. That authority rules over both heaven and earth. The New Testament has much to say about the shockwaves that the Resurrection sent through the Heavenly realm:

“These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:19–21).

The principalities were simply overpowered by the Son of God. The same Resurrection triumph empowers the rescue found at baptism:

“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1 Peter 3:21–22).

They are not common angels. Ephesians 6 links the principalities with Satan, marking them as enemies of Christians:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (vs. 10–12).

We counter the “schemes of the devil” by contending against his high-level agents.

It is not easy to determine if the principalities also include mortal, human leaders (such as Hitler, Nero, or Marx). On the one hand, the terms that apply—principalities, rulers, powers, authorities, thrones, and dominions—commonly refer to human monarchs, emperors, governors, etc. On the other hand, it was thought that the spiritual realm is or-

dered into some political system that mirrors earthly organization. Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). So, non-human powers may be in view. However, the human and the divine were often blended in ancient politics, with some human leaders regarded as divine, as gods (2 Thesalonians and Revelation regard some mortal rulers as satanic). We have already considered Col. 1:16–17, which insists that such powers that God created are both in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible. That sounds like both spirits and humans.

It might be thought that, since “our struggle is not against flesh and blood,” therefore a human enemy is ruled out. However, unless humans were in view, why would Paul ever need to direct us away from “flesh and blood”? Perhaps human leaders are in league with wicked spiritual beings, presenting two options in mode of warfare. So, Paul here forbids using lethal weapons such as knives and guns. Instead, we direct the fight against spiritual forces. This would require spiritual armor and spiritual weaponry (Eph. 6:10ff.), yet they are deployed against real people (not merely against the spirits that drive them). This seems obvious in 2 Cor. 10:2ff.—

“...I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.”

Here, human opponents are engaged with spiritual warfare. One other passage seems to see the “rulers” as full humans:

“...the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

The principalities, as spirits, work through mortal leaders.

Romans 8 gives the reason why Christians regard the principalities as enemies. Paul declares there is no condemnation for Christians empowered by the Spirit. However, they will face suffering (which often feels like condemnation). This is the unavoidable reality since God's Creation has been subjected to inbuilt futility. The Creation groans, and we groan with it. At chapter's end we find a list of the sort of afflictions that cause the suffering: "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (v. 35). No immunity shields us from them. Then another listing follows—a list of possible searches where the "culprits of suffering" may be found:

"neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing" (vs. 38-39).

Nestled among the possible causal factors of Christian suffering are terms that clearly refer to the wicked governing spirits—principalities, (fallen) angels, powers, created things. Even so, Paul sounds a victory note: none of these afflictions—nor their culprits—no such things can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. In other words, even after the principalities have done their worst, there is no condemnation! The satanic forces are clearly enemies, because they bring our suffering in this world.

We have already established that Jesus defeated and overpowered the principalities by His Cross and Resurrection. In light of that, it is painful to admit that they are still quite active. They trouble entire civilizations of people—wounding, oppressing, and even killing (Matt. 10:28; John 10:10). When, at last, will we be rid of them? The answer comes in 1 Corinthians 15:

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the

end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET" (1 Cor. 15:22–27).

The return of Jesus will mark the final end, the abolition of the forces of evil—from Satan, to the principalities, down to the lowliest demon.

Until Jesus returns, are we powerless against wickedness in high places? By no means! To us belongs the risen Jesus in full authority, the power of the indwelling Spirit, and the safe guidance of the Word of God. We are bound to God in the secure covenant that has the Cross and Resurrection as anchor. We have sure promises that guarantee eternal inheritance. We are empowered for spiritual warfare. Our victory has already been won, but we will suffer (as did our Lord) until the last enemy is abolished. God hears our prayers. The battle is His. Whatever hurt and loss we suffer before the End will pale when seen against our final reward. We are more than conquerors. By taking the Cross, Jesus demonstrated that the path of faith ends in total triumph, even after Satan (and the powers under his control) have done all the damage possible to them. The end for the principalities and powers is destruction, while we find a celebration that never ends. We are going to take hits, but we should face the battle with courage:

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:7–11).



The ATONEMENT TRANSACTION OF THE CROSS

John Krivak

There is meaning in the Cross. It means something in particular that it was Jesus who was crucified—something quite different had the victim been anyone else. Of course, any and all victims of crucifixion share in common a fate so cruel that the sad meaning of it goes right to the heart of any and every observer. That horrible meaning is real and ubiquitous for any cross-death. But the victims may be divided into two categories—with Jesus set apart by himself and all others lumped together. The crucified Jesus stands alone because of what His death accomplishes.

We will approach the uniqueness of Jesus by working its essential “transaction of atonement.” This is not to disengage from the raw emotion and pathos. The Cross will still draw our tears and steal our breath. But we must engage our minds to allow our hearts to be filled for the right reasons, and as fully as Jesus deserves. He is worthy.

“And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:4, NASB). Jesus spoke of sins in terms of debt. Peter asked, “How often must I forgive an offending sinner?” Why did Jesus answer with a parable about indebtedness (Matt. 18:21-35)? It makes sense. Since God created us, we are obligated to obey Him. Any unfulfilled obligation is a debt, and it must be paid to God. And when God attached the death penalty to sin, He established the maximum valuation for obedience. Failure to obey comes at the expense of your life! He could have tallied up the sins and demanded

less, “As a consequence, you owe me \$249.19—now pay up!” We may think our high debt to be overpriced. God does not, and the Creator may set His own terms (Romans 6:23).

When Jesus took the Cross, He was paying that debt—not only for you, but for the entire human race. The Bible speaks of this transaction as atonement:

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a [sacrifice of atonement] in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed”

(Romans 3:23–25).

I have substituted “sacrifice of atonement” for the NASB’s “propitiation” and simply wish to sidestep the tangle of translational and interpretational options¹. It is enough for our purposes to establish that “atonement” was required where a relationship had been damaged. Sin causes the damage; atonement repairs the injury. That damage may be repaired (propitiated or expiated) when a sufficient sacrifice restores the relationship. When Jesus was crucified, He repaired our relationship with God by paying off our sin-debt.

¹ These issues are helpfully addressed by Dr. Paul Pollard, *Romans, Truth for Today Commentary*, Eddie Cloer, ed. (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 2018), pp. 124-128.

The transaction paid for on the Cross may be contrasted against theories of “third-party atonement.” Various cults (such as Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists) identify Jesus as a created being—neither God nor human. He may be a created being of the highest order, like an exalted angel—but Jesus is not regarded by them as divine, as the incarnate God. This being, according to the cults, is uniquely qualified to atone because the absolute purity of sinlessness. This angel-being offers the perfect sacrifice.

Now, it may be that the sacrifice of such a being would carry enormous value. But I have to wonder—would the sacrifice of any created angel-being be sufficient to cancel out the sin of all human generations, starting with Adam and Eve? How could one even begin to calculate that? To me, it does not seem adequate. But if we set all of that aside, there is another matter that plainly falsifies the theory. Remember that the transaction (that sin damaged) was between two parties: God and humans. Some angel-being would have to be regarded as an uninvolved, disinterested “third party”! It would be as if you failed on a loan from the bank, and the banker grabbed the first well-dressed person off the street, demanding: “*You seem wealthy enough. Pay off the debt of this miscreant from your own fortune!*” This is injustice to the core. The third-party may have the means to pay off the debt, but owns none of the obligation. And, under these terms, Jesus (an angel-being) appeals to God three times in Gethsemane to get out of the deal, but is thrice denied! This transaction violates the demands of justice. If it were an exalted angel that died for our sins, God would no longer be righteous so as to “be just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26).

Now in contrast, orthodox Christianity interprets the Bible to regard Jesus as divine, as God. He is Immanuel—“God with us.” He is the eternally preexistent Word, the co-Creator that was with God, and was God. With God the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus takes His place as divine Son in the Trinity, or Godhead. When Mary was overshadowed by the Spirit, divine Jesus put on flesh and dwelt

among us. Jesus is God, and one with the Father—yet incarnated as human. The meaning that emerges from this identification is staggering.

In terms of the transaction before us, Jesus (himself God) is the primary to whom we owe the debt! And, Jesus (as God) is also the one paying off the debt!!! Shocking, but this makes sense. Only God has the resources to pay off a bill of such incomprehensible magnitude. But if God also takes it upon himself to pay off what we owe Him, then the settlement is sheer grace! Think here of John 3:16! Or this:

*“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, **namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them**, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”*

(2 Corinthians 5:14–21).

And this:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich”

(2 Corinthians 8:9).

He paid the debt He did not owe!

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. Animals of Old Covenant sacrifices had to be flawless in physical

form, but Jesus was perfect in sinlessness. That means that He was impeccable in characteristics that apply in covenant—love, faithful loyalty, righteousness. In this, the divine Jesus is Godlike. I don't quite know how to say this, but Jesus—as a human—was also perfect. This “new Adam” succeeds sinlessly where we all have failed. Jesus is both God and man—the God-Man. In himself, Jesus is the perfect model for both sides of the relationship between God and His human creatures. He is qualified to stand in representatively on both sides of the transaction. Look at Jesus, and see what it means both to be in authority, and to be under authority—and perfectly so in each case.

It is here the role of Jesus as mediator between us and God comes into focus. The Son of God is uniquely qualified to represent both transactors and their deepest interests. He mediates a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). There is a rich quality in His sacrificially shed blood that surpasses not only that of animals, but that of Abel—a (merely human) victim also pure in innocence. The mediator had to be himself human, as Paul writes:

“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time”

(1 Timothy 2:3–6, NASB).

The humanity of Jesus, it will be seen, was as necessary as His divinity.

Let's return to the atonement transaction. Only one thing could move further in the direction of justice. Only Jesus, as God, could pay the debt. Yet only the human (not God) carried the obligation to pay—and the wages of sin is death. To avoid the same injustice that belongs to theories of “third-party atonement,” Jesus has to be fully human as well as fully divine:

*“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, **God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as***

an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”

(Romans 8:3–4).

Jesus took His place among us, setting aside His divine prerogatives:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:5–11)

So, to sum up, satisfying the transaction between sinners and their Creator required a Being who (perfectly) is God and (perfectly) is human—Jesus! Only God has the resources to pay the debt; only the human is under the obligation to pay up. John Stott² rightly sees “substitution” as the essential factor in this transaction:

The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 160.

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FRIENDS of LIGHT

Caleb Lehman

One topic that has stood out to me since a young age is friendship. I've had many friends thus far, and several have remained my closest friends for over ten years. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without them, nor do I want to. They have remained my anchors, my counselors, and my supporters through all these years. All of them are faithful children of God, and I love every single one of them so much. Each one has taught me something different that I needed to improve on. Faith, confidence, servitude, boldness, support, wisdom, discretion, and many more. Each of my friends taught me something priceless in value, and I will always carry those attributes with me for the rest of my life.

No matter who your friends are, there is one vital lesson everyone needs to remember. Paul, through the inspiration of God, wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:33: "Be not deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." The friends you keep closest to you *will* be a major factor in who you become as a person. They have powerful influence, both for good and for evil. With this knowledge, each of us must surround ourselves with godly people, those who fear the Lord and keep His commandments. When we do, we can lift each other up in times of trouble, strife, grief, and weakness. If we are to be good

friends to each other, we must be friends with God first. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14)

God is our strength, and our refuge. Our friends are our supporters, and we, likewise, are a supporter to them. Christianity has never been a "You have to do this yourself" life. Those of you who put a heavy burden on yourselves, thinking you have to do it on your own, that you have to prove yourself; do not believe this misconception. Galatians 6:2 instructs to "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." We cannot bear each other's loads if we do not share our loads, nor can you expect them to share their troubles with you if you do not do the same. Those of you who are struggling, pray to God, as this should always be our first choice, not our last. Then, consult your friends. Whether that be your spouse, your parents, or your comrades, do not be afraid to share your burdens. If you remember nothing else from this lesson, remember this:

"Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up."

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS – A BRIEF HISTORY OF COBB PUBLISHING

Bradley S. Cobb

It doesn't seem like the *Quarterly* should be starting year seven, and it definitely doesn't seem like Cobb Publishing should already be ten years old! But it is. And in case you wondered how it all happened, I will give you some of the inside scoop, a brief history of it all.

First, I blame Keith Ingram from Marion, Illinois. I'd known him and his wife for years (they gave me my first job) when he put the book idea into my head. When my family visited Marion back when we were going to preaching school, I was asked to teach the Bible class. I chose to teach the letter to Philemon (it's short, and is hardly ever taught or talked about). After class, Keith came up to me and said, "That was really interesting. You need to put that in a book." If I remember correctly, that was somewhere around 2010.

It took three more years before my beautiful wife, Jesse, convinced me to finally put that idea into action. I tried to sell copies of it to folks on Facebook. And when I say copies, I mean from my printer. Then a friend suggested to me that I could make it a *real* book, and connected me with a company that would print them for me.

That first book, *The Prodigal Slave: A Study of the Letter to Philemon* was well-received.¹ And it started the company. In that first year (2013), we published a commentary on Jude, a collection of sermons on the Beatitudes, and a couple collections of writings about two Restoration Movement figures: Alexander Campbell and Abner Jones.

The next year, in addition to republishing some Restoration Movement books, we published my commentaries on James and Habakkuk.

It was in 2015 that it became more than just "Brad's writings and random Restoration Movement

stuff." Barbara Dowell, one of the members in McCloud, OK (where I then preached) asked if I would be willing to publish a book for her. I agreed, and *The Life of the Apostle Paul* saw the light of day (and was given the "highest possible recommendation" by *Christian Woman Magazine*). We also published my *The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*, as well as two children's books about princesses.

2016 I began working with Bill Howard on his books for new and growing Christians (see ad elsewhere in this issue). This was also the year I made the decision to test the market for a new brotherhood magazine. I hadn't decided on a name, so I just referred to it as "the quarterly" until I figured out what to call it. Obviously, I never came up with anything. Several friends submitted articles, and the "preview edition" of the *Quarterly* came out near the end of the year.

2017 was when everything seemed to take off. We published some 30 titles that year, including brand-new books written by Andy Erwin, Kyle Frank, Mark McWhorter, Bill Howard, Stephane Maillet, Gantt Carter, and Dorothy Pensoneau.

In 2018, the list of authors whose books we published grew even more: Earl Kimbrough, Danny Davis, Gary Henson (whose *The Ivory Domino* is one of the most popular books we've ever published), Jesse Ellison, and Kevin Micuch all joined the ranks. Throughout all of this, we continued to publish more Restoration Movement titles, mostly revitalized editions of older books.

2019 saw brand new books from folks like Scott Harp (whose *Sage of Jasper: A Biography of Gus Nichols* was our first book to debut in hardcover), Roy Knight, Kyle Frank, Mitch Robison, and Roderick Ross—all of whom have also contributed to the *Quarterly* (because they're cool like that). Also that year, we released Brittany Richardson's book *The Other Side of the Storm: Recovering From Your Husband's Porn Addiction*.

¹ You can read a review of it by Adam Faughn here:

<https://faughnfamily.com/good-week-prodigal-slave-philemon/>

Then came the Covid year, 2020. New books from Andy Erwin, Mitch Robison, Dorothy Pensoneau, Kevin Micuch, and John Krivak were released. This was also the year we started bringing back old Restoration Movement journals, starting with the *American Christian Review*. It was also at the end of this year that Cobb Publishing acquired So&So Publishing (run by friend, *Quarterly* regular, and all-around nice guy, Kyle Frank).

In 2021, we published a short book called *The Destruction of Jerusalem: Illustrated Edition* (the original was released in 1804, I think) as something for local members to read for a quick overview of that event and how it matches with Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 (and some other passages). Surprisingly, it is routinely one of our most popular titles. We also focused on publishing as much of Earl Kimbrough's material as we could, as he was in failing health, and we wanted him to be able to see the fruit of his work before he went on to

his reward. In addition, we published brand new books from Caleb Lehman, Tammy Dean, Dorothy Pensoneau, Craig Waddell, and Chuck Wyeth.

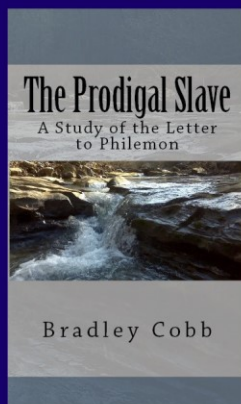
2022 saw the long-awaited release of *War in Heaven War on Earth* (my commentary on Revelation), as well as *Don't Forget: A Commentary on Second Peter*. Additionally, new books by Danny Davis, Adam Cozort, Andy Erwin, Bill Howard, Roy Knight, Kyle Frank, Caleb Lehman, Chuck Wyeth, and Mark Tabata were released.

Throughout each of these years, we also republished various debates, sermon collections, commentaries, and Restoration Movement histories and journals so they could be more accessible (and much cheaper than buying the originals).

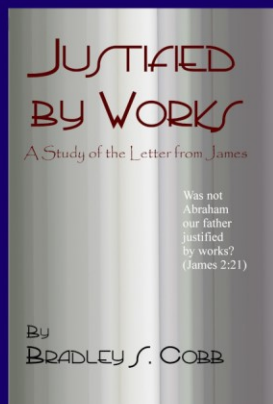
So all that there was probably more information than you wanted or needed, but it's our 10-year anniversary, and we wanted to share our excitement!

Thanks for reading it.

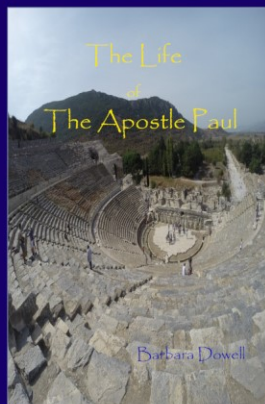
TEN YEARS OF COBB PUBLISHING!



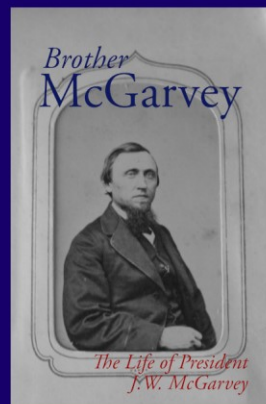
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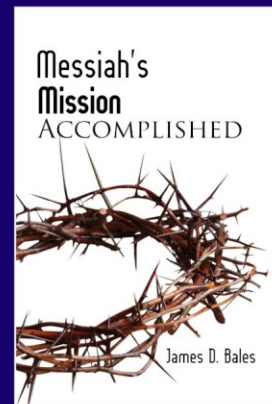
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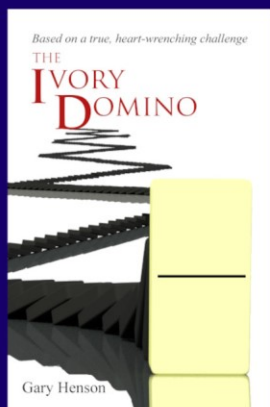
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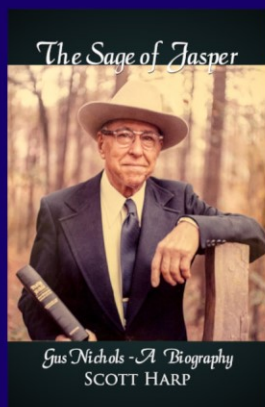
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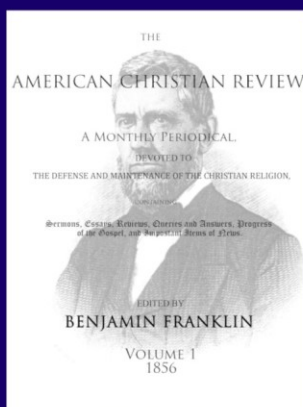
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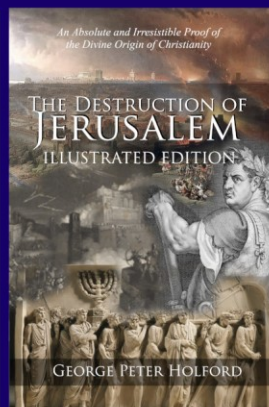
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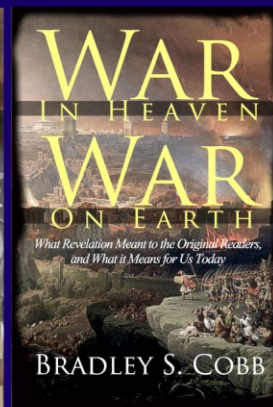
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Christian Fellowship

Hatton Allen

The discussion of fellowship has come and gone in religious circles. Some adopt the philosophy of maintaining a kind of “unity in diversity,” while others treat fellowship as a privilege available only to a select few. Both positions are extremes which can be taken. The matter before us now is God’s fellowship and who is granted the ability to enjoy that sweet relationship. This subject matter will be tackled in the following fashion: first, a study of where fellowship began; second, a study of how fellowship manifests itself; third, a discussion of how God extends fellowship today; fourth, what helps one to maintain fellowship with God; fifth, what removes one from God’s fellowship; and finally, what must be done for those who once were in God’s fellowship, but are living an ungodly lifestyle. At the end, it is the hope that a proper framework will be established for fellowship not only with God, but with one’s fellow man.

Where Fellowship Began

For one to discuss the inception of any subject, one must find its earliest influences. If one wishes to discuss higher criticism, one must go back to the days of Schleiermacher and those he taught. If one desires to study the church in a general sense, one will appeal to passages from the prophets, then appeal to Acts 2 for its entrance into the world. The study of fellowship is the same in this respect. The origin, condition, and breaking of fellowship will now be expanded.

First, the origins of fellowship. The origins of fellowship ensued when man was created in the beginning. Within each man is the desire to appeal to a higher being. This is done because each desires knowledge pertaining to his origins and purpose in this life. God created this world so that mankind can make a choice. The choice falls between these two options: serve God faithfully and love Him totally or reject God and do not serve Him. From this deci-

sion derives the grounds of fellowship. If one decides to love God and serve Him faithfully, then this causes one to be in God's fellowship. So many have not chosen who they will serve. Many in this world try to maintain a foothold in God's camp while still having an affair with the devil on the side. This is a double-minded fellow who is unstable (Jam. 1:8).

Second, the condition of fellowship. In the case of Genesis, the condition of fellowship was that man could not partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). God's fellowship does have conditions which is proven by the previously mentioned verse. When the conditions are met, then one can walk in God's fellowship, as attested by the ability to eat of every tree in the garden except the specified one (Gen. 2:16-17). It is important to note that a law was given at this point. Without a law, there is no chance for any kind of transgression. Sin is described as a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). Without law, no one could know how dangerous transgression is.

Third, the breaking of fellowship. The only way that fellowship can be broken is on man's side, not God's. So many think that God is the one who causes fellowship to be broken. As demonstrated by the ensuing discussion, one will find this is not the case. The Bible must be opened to Genesis 3 for this portion of the discussion. The serpent told the woman "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). After this statement, both Adam and Eve partook of the fruit (Gen. 3:6). What was the specific sin committed on this occasion? The sin was thinking Adam and Eve knew better than God. The tree did not give them the knowledge of good and evil. They took upon themselves the ability to decide what is good and evil based on their own subjective standard. Consequently, mankind was driven from the garden of Eden and a flaming sword was placed on the east edge to keep the tree of life from being touched (Gen. 3:24). This is the first instance of God withdrawing fellowship. This was warranted because God's conditions were trans-

gressed.

How Does Fellowship Manifest Itself?

At this stage, one must acknowledge a key concept. It is possible for one to know whether he is in fellowship with God. Contrary to the views of the Postmodernist, this is an absolute truth, and it can be known without a shadow of a doubt. People wander through this life aimlessly, thinking they are saved one minute and lost the next. This position runs contrary to what any biblical writer recorded. In this section, two passages will be given specific attention: Romans 8:16-17 and 1 John 5:7-8, 10. These two passages will help one distinguish between being in and out of fellowship.

First, Romans 8:16-17 must be noted. The passage states "the Spirit itself [an important note here, the Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is a divine being with the same pronouns as God. **HDA**] witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." The task befalls us to break this verse down. The phrase "beareth witness" warrants attention. The word conveys the idea of "bearing joint witness" (Thayer 596). The Holy Spirit is said to bear witness with our spirit. How is this accomplished? It is accomplished through the Word now. If our spirit stands in goodness as compared with the Word, then we know we are in God's fellowship. The standard is only measured by God's Word. It was Lipscomb who said:

"...if the Spirit of God and our spirit give assurance that we have been adopted as children of God, we know that we become heirs of his inheritance and joint heirs with Jesus, the only begotten Son of God" (151).

Second, 1 John 5:7-8, 10 will be discussed. The same idea is expressed in this passage as the one in Romans. The sentiment is expressed in a different way. At 1 John 5:7, there is a trinitarian expression of bearing record with our souls. All members of the Godhead play a quintessential role in bearing record with our spirits. The word for "bear record" is

μαρτυρία, which conveys the idea of “making a solemn appeal.” The appeal of bearing witness with our spirit is solemn in nature because of the deeply abiding ramifications that come along with it. Why is a great deal of importance given to the Godhead bearing witness with our spirit? 1 John 5:10 answers the question in this way: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness of himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” This record gives eternal life and whoever does not have it doesn’t possess eternal life (1 John 5:11-12).

How Does God Extend Fellowship Today?

This question possesses a multi-faceted answer. The answer will be determined by God’s standards as found in the Bible. There are some key elements which must be discussed. Without nailing down the proper parameters of God’s fellowship, one stands in a great deal of trouble because of a supposed self-understanding. At the outset, it is important to emphasize that the answers do not lie within human wisdom. Why? First, it is not within us to direct our own steps (Jer. 10:23). God set forth the pattern and many deliberately ignore it. Second, God is to be the one directing the path (Pro. 3:5-6). The human mind is so unstable at times that someone attempting to direct their own steps is easily deceived and discouraged. With these things in mind, let us proceed delicately and show to who and where God extends His fellowship.

First, where God extends His fellowship is important. Many assume God extends His fellowship in any place that calls itself a church. Unfortunately, many fall for this device because they do not approve of abiding by another’s standards. People want to do their own thing. Where God extends His fellowship is important. The simple answer is that God extends fellowship to the church. However, the answer is never this simple. Let’s now give some evidence for the claim. All spiritual blessings are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3). How does one prove that being in Christ means being in fellowship? When one receives blessings, there is a certain place to

which one must appeal. Where must someone go? It must be a central location that is pre-established. Christ was foreordained to rule over the church. To get to Christ, one must get to the church. How does one prove this? Christ is the head of the church which is called the body (Eph. 5:23). There is only one body (Eph. 4:4). What is the body? It is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). So, one may logically conclude that to gain spiritual blessings in Christ, then one must meet Christ where He is, which is the church.

Second, to whom does God extend His fellowship? Formerly, God worked through the children of Israel because they were His chosen people. They were the ones through whom the Messiah would come (Gen. 49:10). The gospel message was intended for all people (Rom. 1:16). When the church was established, it was meant for all people, nations, and languages (Dan. 7:14). All of them would flow to it (Isa. 2:2-4). The importance to this point is crucial because of the ushering in of the Gentiles (Acts 10:34ff). Those in Cornelius’ house received the gift of tongues because tongues were a sign to unbelievers (Acts 10:46; 1 Cor. 14:22). This tells one immediately that there were unbelievers in the house. Who were they? Peter and the other Jews who did not think the Gentiles belonged in the church. Peter was withstood to the face by Paul for the same actions (Gal. 2:11-15). Paul emphasized later that all are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). He uses this because women were treated like second-class citizens, free men looked down on the enslaved, and Jews looked down on anyone who was not one. Amid all this, Christ is the glue which holds the church together. If Paul can be a member of the church after what he did, then anyone can be!

What Helps One Maintain Fellowship?

Now that a proper framework for fellowship is established, it is important to expound on how someone maintains fellowship once it’s attained. Contrary to what some suggest, it is not “once in fellowship, always in fellowship.” If this is not the case, then what can be done to maintain fellowship

with Christ? Two different areas will be discussed: benevolence and sanctification. At the end of this section, the hope is that one will be able to maintain fellowship better by understanding more fully what it takes.

First, one maintains fellowship by benevolence. James 1:27 is the first passage of appeal in this section. The first half of this verse states, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, **to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction**” (Emphasis mine, HDA). This is the maintenance of their spiritual needs. Individuals who are without spiritual guidance are to be cared for in this respect. The second passage of appeal is 1 Timothy 3:2, which says an elder must be “given to hospitality.” This means that he seeks out those who have lack in their lives, whether physical or otherwise. The final passage for appeal is Galatians 6:10, which says, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” All Christians have a responsibility not only to those of the outside, but also those who are within. If we do these things to show love for our fellow man, then we show we have fellowship with Christ (Mat. 22:37-39).

Second, one maintains fellowship by sanctification. When one meets God’s terms of salvation, then one pledges to live a separate life. All Christians are a peculiar people (1 Pet. 2:9). The ASV translates “peculiar people” as “a people for God’s own possession,” which is a better rendering given what is at stake. Another passage to consider is Romans 12:1-2. There is a two-part recognition made by Paul here. First, Paul urges the brethren in Rome to present their bodies as living sacrifices, so they are holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1). Why? It is our reasonable service. It is rational for us to do this is the idea conveyed. Second, Paul formulates an argument in which the point of sanctification is emphasized. He told the audience not to be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom. 12:2). There are two Greek words that Paul uses. The word for “conformed” is the word *schematizo*, from which we get our word

“schematic.” We ought not be after the same schematics as the world, which one knows lead to destruction. Rather, Christians ought to be transformed. Paul used the word *metamorphoō*, from which we get our word metamorphosis. It is a complete change from what was there originally. When this change is visible, one is in fellowship with God once His conditions are met for salvation.

What Removes One From God’s Fellowship?

Since it is possible for one to maintain fellowship, the antithetical thought is that one may lose fellowship with God. It is unfortunate when someone obeys the truth then turns from it. That causes so much pain for the ones who are still in fellowship with God because a special bond is lost. The bond of being together is lost. However, the bond can be recovered once God’s conditions of repentance are met. For our purposes in this section, it is important to recognize what causes one to remove himself from God’s fellowship. There are a few things one can do that will cause removal from God’s fellowship: open engagement of sin without repentance, walking contrary to the pattern, and preaching false doctrine.

First, one removes himself from God’s fellowship when openly sinning and refusing to repent. Paul addressed this in direct fashion at 1 Corinthians 5. A brother at Corinth had his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5:1). Though this was apparently public knowledge, the brethren there walked around with pride rather than lamenting over the shame brought upon Christ’s bride. The basic call from Paul was to put that person away from fellowship with the church (1 Cor. 5:13). More will be discussed on this point later.

Second, those who decide to walk contrary to the pattern remove themselves from God’s fellowship. Those who walk contrary to the pattern given are described as “disorderly” (2 The. 3:6). The word is a military term used to describe someone who is walking out of the ranks. This individual in turn brings reproach, which is the antithesis to that which Paul previously requested (1 The. 4:11-12).

Third, the one who preaches false doctrine re-

moves himself from God's fellowship. Paul told the Galatians that if anyone preached a message contrary to what was preached by the apostles, this individual was to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Paul told the brethren at Rome to mark those which cause divisions contrary to the doctrine and avoid them (Rom. 16:17). It is important to do this because the purity of teaching within the congregation must be maintained above all else.

What Must be Done to Those Who Walk Disorderly?

It is an unfortunate time when someone makes the decision to walk away from Christ. It hurts much more because the individual should know better than to depart from the pattern. Unfortunately for the departer, the end will be worse with them than the beginning (2 Pet. 2:20-22). There is a procedure that one must follow when addressing sin and those who are impenitent. The procedure is found at Matthew 18:15-17. Each of the steps for this process are as follows: tell him about his fault between you and him alone, take two or three witnesses, tell it to the church, and let him be known as a heathen and a publican.

In the first place, the fault must be told between the offender and the offended only (Mat. 18:15). It is key to recognize the Lord's teachings on this. So many let conflicts fester and they allow said conflicts to get in the way of Christian growth. When a conflict arises, one is not to come to worship (Mat. 5:23-24). That gift does not become offered until the conflict is resolved. A married man cannot get prayers answered when he is at odds with his own wife (1 Pet. 3:7). Once the offence is reconciled, then the gift can be offered with God's blessing. It is important to note that if the offender repents, then no further action is warranted.

If this does not resolve the matter, then two or three witnesses must be taken (Mat. 18:16). It is important to note that the witnesses are not taken to prove one side or the other wrong. The witnesses are to be there simply to verify that an effort was made to correct whatever the issue may be. The

passage quotation is Deuteronomy 19:15. In the original context, the passage refers to how iniquities ought to be handled. Two or three witnesses are to be called to set things straight. If a witness was found false, then those involved were taken before the priests and judges (Deu. 19:16). Once the witness was found false, the evil was to be put away.

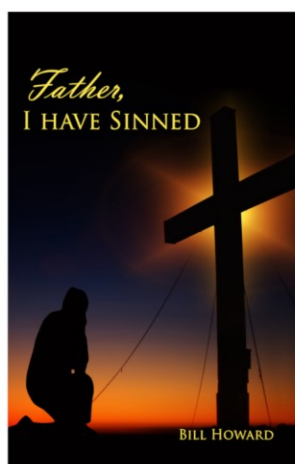
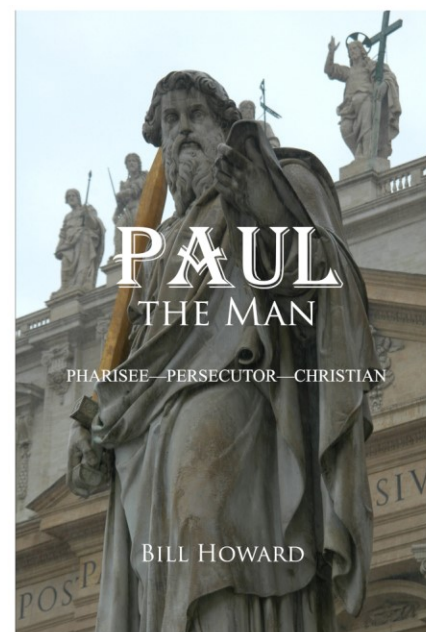
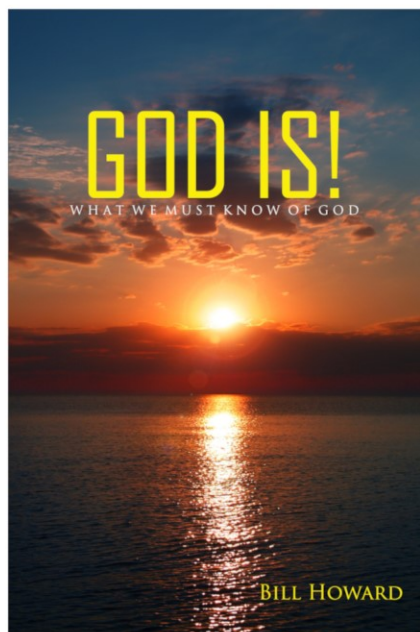
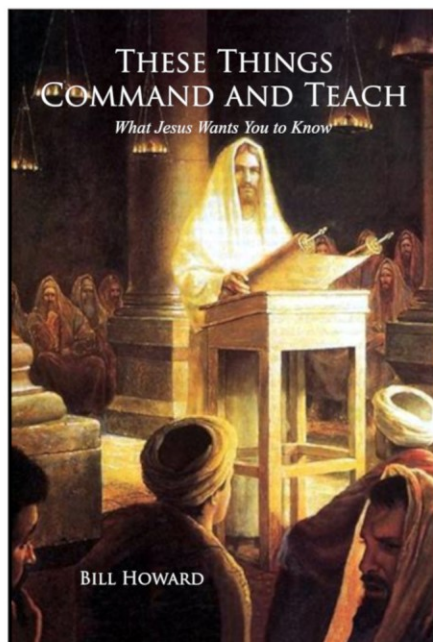
Once the witnesses are called and no progress is made, then the church must be told (Mat. 18:17). It is important for people to know what is going on with an individual. However, not every detail needs to be spelled out. People will know if someone has been unfaithful because the individual's sin will find them out (Num. 32:23). It is not our jobs to be vigilantes, but it is our job to keep each other accountable. That is done by making every opportunity to convict people by God's teachings. If the Word cannot convict someone, then nothing an individual will say can change someone's mind.

Finally, when the church is told and no repentance is made, the individual must be marked. The one who walks contrary to God's teachings are to be marked (2 The. 3:6). Although one has been withdrawn from, it is important to continue exhorting the individual (2 The. 3:14-15). There is a distinction between looking upon someone as an enemy and admonishing someone. When an individual is withdrawn from, said person ought to feel something missing. They ought to long to be in fellowship with the church. If they do, then repentance will be made, and the individual will be welcomed back into God's fold.

Conclusion

Fellowship is important because of all the things that come along with it. The sense of camaraderie is paramount to one's success in God's service. It is the responsibility of each person in God's kingdom to take care of themselves. God's fellowship is not only important now, but it is also important for the life to come. If one is in God's fellowship at that point, then the greatest reward is there. Let us all now work to being in God's fellowship for eternity!

Books for new and growing Christians



By Bill Howard
These books can all be purchased
inexpensively on Amazon.com,
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WITH YOUR EYES SET ON JESUS FOLLOW HIM AND GO WITH HIM

Gerald Cowan

Joshua 1-4, Philippians 3:10-16, Hebrews 12:1-3

Today we stand on the brink of an unknown and generally unknowable future. Of course it happens every “New Year’s Day,” but in some sense every day. The past is always in the past, behind us. Hopefully we have learned something beneficial from what is now behind us. George Santayana is famous for this maxim: “Those who do not learn from history may be doomed to repeat it.” We notice the usual results and consequences of a particular action or enterprise, sometimes good, beneficial, and desirable but sometimes harmful, destructive, and undesirable. If it works well and produces desirable results we repeat it, expecting the same results for us. We should also expect that what has produced unwanted results before will produce the same results when tried again. It is this negative result about which Santayana warns. There is a correlative, often but probably incorrectly, attributed to Albert Einstein: “Doing the same thing over and over again in the same way but expecting a different result is a kind of insanity.” Both maxims are nearly axiomatic, self-evident, but a lot of time and energy are wasted trying to disprove them both.

In one sense it is true that we have never before been at the exact same point where we are now this present day. A New Year’s Day does find us facing a

completely new time – we have not been this far before, but every day finds us standing in the same position: in the exact center between all that has been (the complete past) and all that will yet be (the complete future). I had intended to write about Luke 18:8b, *When the Son of Man (Jesus) comes again* — He will come, though we know not when — *will He find faith on the earth?* This is generally misunderstood because the common translations omit one key word, the definite article *the*. It says “*the faith*” in the original text but simply the generic “*faith*” in most translations. Will our Lord find any believers still believing? Yes, quite likely. Will Jesus find “the faith,” the precise pattern, “the way” to God through Him (John 14:6) that He instituted and intended to prevail for all mankind until He himself returns to end the world? The very fact that He asked the question leads one to conclude that it would be and is uncertain. We may pursue that thought at another time but here’s the thought we will pursue for now: If you know where the Lord is, go to Him. If you know where our Lord is going, go with Him. Will it be easy or difficult? Will we be successful or not?

We do not know, we cannot know with certainty what the future will bring. The recent past and present of our government, the world, and the churches casts a shadow on our future. Is there a glimmer of

light we can shed, a hope we can share to encourage us? Yes, I believe there is, and that's what I'm presenting in this essay. We can learn a great and helpful lesson from the history of God's people in the Bible. Though we should not expect the miracles to be repeated, is it possible and probable that God will do for us something of what He has done for others? If so, to what extent and under what conditions? It will be determined by where and on what our hearts and hopes are set and where they stay. Should we be discouraged about that, or should it simply cause us to choose our way carefully and proceed with caution?

A Lesson to be Learned from Crossing the Jordan River into the Land of Promise.

Please read the full text of Joshua Chapters 1, 3 and 4 at one time when you can think carefully about it. The application will come easily to your mind. I will mention a few points to consider.

Joshua 1:9, 3:1-5. After 40 years of hardship and wilderness wandering due to a serious lapse in faith and much murmuring and complaining against God, and against Moses too, the nation of Israel stood on the brink of entry into a land and life God had promised to Abraham and repeated to Israel when he led them out of slavery in Egypt. They were camped on the bank of the Jordan River, looking with wishful eyes across the river in full flood stage barring their entry into Canaan.

Moses was the greatest man of the Old Testament up to that time: prophet, miracle worker, spokesman of God, law-giver, historian, mediator, great warrior, intrepid leader — Moses was God's greatest servant for more than 40 years. But he had died, excluded from entry into the promised land by a curious failure on his part to obey and glorify God, but instead arrogate to himself some authority and glory. God did not let it pass nor did He allow Moses' prior successes to gloss over his great failure. God spoke to Joshua, who had proven himself to be a faithful servant to God and a great help to Moses, with what must be the most fearful challenge and biggest "rise in pay grade" ever made to

anyone: "Joshua, My servant Moses is dead. You will take his place as leader of Israel; you will take this nation into the land I have promised" (1:1-2). But do not fear. As I was with Moses so will I be with you. If you keep faith with Me you will succeed in what I send you to do.

So, finally, they stand looking into what may be ahead. What might they see in this new land? Did victory and reward from God lie ahead? Did danger and possible defeat? They had suffered defeat often enough during 40 years of wilderness wandering to know that any failure, any lapse of faith on their part might once again defer them from receiving the promise. What possible losses, what possible gains? Would they live there, or die there? What unforeseeable events would transpire there? After three days (Joshua 3:1ff), Joshua informed the people they would be crossing Jordan into Canaan and gave specific orders on procedure. The priests would carry the Ark of the Covenant, the waters would be stopped and the people could cross over on dry ground. What was this Ark of the Covenant? It had been constructed under God's precise directions (see Exodus 25) to be both a container and a symbol to the people of God's Covenant with them, and of His personal presence with them. Measuring about 4 feet x 2 feet and 2 feet deep, inlaid with gold inside and out, with a golden cherub at each end on the top and a gold pad to be called "the mercy seat" between the outstretched wings of the cherubim on top. There God would meet with Moses and His people during Moses' life, and after Moses too, to give guidance and assurance. It can be suggested that the Ark of the Covenant was a *type* of Christ who would be with the people as mediator and surety of a new covenant in the promised land. In the crossing of Jordan the priests were to carry the Ark and remain on the then-dry river bed until all the people had passed over. As long as the priests with the Ark were still in the river all water from above (North) would be cut off and stacked up in a heap and the river bed would be dry on south to the Salt Sea, now called the Dead Sea (Joshua 3:13-17). No narrow or single file crossing, but a mass crossing

accomplished in a relatively short time. The Ark was effectively *Immanuel*, “God With Us.” The Shekinah, the Glory of God, was present when the Ark was present. At a later time the Ark was captured by the Philistines in a battle that became a devastating rout and defeat for Israel. The two sons of Eli the Priest died in the battle and Eli himself, when he heard of it, fell off his seat, broke his neck, and died. The wife of Phinehas, Eli’s son was in childbirth. When she heard that her husband, her brother-in-law and her father-in-law had died and the Ark was captured, she named her new son Ichabod to signify “the Glory of God departed” from Israel. Missing the visible symbol of God’s presence could mean God himself was no longer with His people.

An armed detachment of some 40,000 men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh would precede the mass of people to keep them safe from attack when they came out on the other side of Jordan into the land of Canaan. Here’s the remarkable instruction of God – don’t miss the key to success (Joshua 3:1-4). Watch until you see the ark of the covenant being carried by the priests, **“then go after it.”** But they were to keep a distance of about half a mile (2,000 cubits) away from it. Keep your eyes on the Ark (equivalent to a much later admonition, keeping your eyes on Jesus the anti-type represented by it). When it (He) moves, move with Him; follow Him wherever He goes. The caveat: *For you have not passed this way before.* If you do not follow the Ark you may be lost: if you do not follow Christ you will be lost. We will return to that point later in the lesson.

The Example of Peter Walking on Water Shows the Problems We Have When We Take Our Eyes Away from Jesus.

Matthew 14:22-32. Peter and the other apostles, having been sent ahead by Jesus, saw Him late at night walking on the waters of the sea, approaching their boat. When Jesus reassured them not to be afraid but to trust that it was really him Peter made a bold and brash request: “Lord, if it is really You,

command me and let me **walk to you on the water.**” He asked to be enabled to walk on the water with Jesus. “Let me come to You on the water.” And Jesus said, “Come (to me).” Request granted and Peter did it. But when he realized what he was doing and how strong the wind and waves were, he started to sink. Taking Jesus at His word he was able to do the impossible (as Jesus was doing). But suddenly remembering that, though Jesus could do such things, normal men could not – *he* could not, and suddenly he wasn’t doing it any more. Then the now-terrified erstwhile water-walker called to Jesus, “Lord I’m sinking; save me.” Jesus did save him, though he rebuked him for his loss of faith, his lack of faith. When they got into the boat everything became calm; they worshipped Jesus for this bit of evidence that He was in fact the Son of God.

We are not promised ability to perform miracles, nor even that some miracle might be performed in our behalf. Though God could and can, indeed, do for us what He has done for others, there is no promise that He will do so. Stuart Hamblen’s song **“It is no secret what God can do”** (1950) is not inspired by God nor is it a part of His word, but it gives a false promise in God’s name, as many other popular hymns have done. Unless the Lord himself has promised it, do not look to hymn-writers, or preachers to fulfill promises God has not made. Take a lesson from apostle Paul: He could do all (those things and more) through Christ who strengthened him and made him able (Philippians 4:13). Paul was not claiming he could do miraculous things, genuinely impossible things, nor did he promise that any other Christian could do whatever he, Paul, had done or could do. In context (Philippians chapters 3 and 4) Paul claimed ability to succeed in whatever the Lord asked, commanded, or required of him, and everything he himself had volunteered or committed himself to do for the Lord. *I can do everything I am required to do, everything He asks or commands me to do*, things that would be impossible for anybody without Christ (4:13). Certainly any Christian can say the same: I can do

whatever I am called by Christ to do, with the ability and resources that He himself supplies.

***It is Good that We do not Know
Everything that Lies Ahead.***

We might probably want to know all the good things that are coming, but that might not be good for us. We might set our eyes on the good thing and possibly ignore all other things, including the works that Jesus wants us to do in coming to Him. Like the unattainable carrot on the stick that keeps the donkey moving forward but stays always out of reach, never being received, the hope of receiving it never being actually fulfilled. It is a bit cheapening, isn't it, to be motivated only by the possibility but not probability of reward. We would probably not do much to attain it, but just wait for it to come to us as promised. We would undoubtedly be disappointed because the prize is not attainable without the required preceding work – If you do *this* I will give you *that*. If you don't I won't. We may lose what otherwise we could have had.

If we knew what bad things, miseries, disappointments, hardships, failures, and even deaths would come, and when they would come, we might just lose heart and quit. Experiencing those miseries in advance would take all the joy out of life. There is something good to be said about taking things as they come – good or bad – just taking it from the Lord's hand, thanking Him for the good and trusting Him to help us endure and overcome the bad. Job had a wonderful word on this subject: Shall we accept God when things are good but blame Him and reject Him in adversity? (Job 1:21, 2:20). If we allow it, the “what ifs” will defeat us.

***Philippians 3:7-14 Adds Something Very
Important to the Lesson.***

Above everything else, Paul wanted to be in Christ and with Christ, and perfectly like Christ –

not only in life but after this life in the final resurrection and eternity to follow it, to become and be and do what Christ had laid hold on him for (3:7-12). He had not attained it yet, but he considered it to be within reach since Christ's call to him included it (3:12). He could not attain it by glorying in his past (3:13). As long as he lived it would still be ahead of him, to be attained. He must stretch himself forward, moving always toward the goal where

Christ is and to which He calls – the high upward calling of the Lord to the promised prize (3:14). And, as already noted, the Lord enables

***Take your eyes off Jesus and you are
sure to lose, to fail the test.***

the faithful “stretcher” to be a prize winner.

Something else from Paul will encourage us to keep our eyes on Jesus and follow Him wherever He goes (Romans 12:1-3). As J.B. Phillips paraphrases it: “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God it is an act of intelligent worship,” allowing God to remake one's mind to give oneself as a living sacrifice to God by which one proves that God meets all demands and moves one toward true maturity. Necessary inference: Don't think you can do it alone. Without Christ and without doing all that is requested and commanded of you, you cannot win. Take your eyes off Jesus and you are sure to lose, to fail the test.

***Now You Have The Lesson.
Read It In Hebrews 12:1b-2a.***

It is possible to keep the faith and arrive in the Lord's promised land (heaven) of which Canaan is a type. With the great cloud of witnesses (from Hebrews 11) to cheer us on and say, “We did it. You can do it too,” *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith ...* see where He is going and go after Him, go with Him, stay with Him until you get to heaven where you will stay with Him and all the people of God forever.

WHAT IS NEW ABOUT A NEW YEAR

How many years have come and gone
With mankind settling round the earth
And taking with him all he'd won,
Leaving good and bad he'd done?
What would his new exploits be worth?

What has been built? and will it stay
To mark the progress of mankind,
Or with the old years pass away
And man continue just to play
And to God's will for him be blind?

Is now his zenith, or nadir?
Has he the plan of God fulfilled
That our God's glory be made clear,
Or filled the earth with dread and fear
And for man's pride and glory build?

All years of history have passed
No day of it will be returned.
A new year comes but will not last.
Old is gone, new will go as fast.
We must apply what has been learned.

We make the new year bad or good,
Draw close to God or drift away.
Will we do what we said we would,
Be more like God – we know we should
Be more like Him each passing day.

The Lord helps us correct and mend.
And have what He designed us for.
To help us do that, He did send
His Son, our Savior, Lord and Friend,
His Holy Spirit and much more.

What we have learned and know must last
Through life. All questions that remain
Unanswered when our life has passed
We will find answered when, at last,
In heaven, God makes all things plain.

Don't count on new years, seize each day
To be in Jesus justified,
To share His blessings all the way
To share in Him eternal day,
Our zenith heaven at His side

God has reserved, Christ will prepare
A place in heav'n for every one
Whom He has chosen to be there,
With Him and with His Christ to share
The crown of life the saved have won.

Dear God in heaven we come now.
Forgive us, cleanse us, set us free.
In living sacrifice we bow.
Pledged to repent, renew our vow,
Rescued from what we've come to be.

What You have given may we use
In all remaining time on earth
To do for You what You would choose,
And all ungodliness refuse
In Jesus secure our rebirth

You can't relive your yesterday.
You've lost more than you may dream.
The debt you still owe Christ will pay,
And all your sins He'll wash away,
Your soul and spirit to redeem.

Whatever comes, no doubt or fear
Can overcome us for we know
He is always standing near,
In all our troubles to give cheer
That on to heaven we may go.

— Gerald Cowan
January 1, 2023



BEHOLD, THE MAN

Bill Howard

These are the words of Pontius Pilate (John 19:5) who at this time in history was the Roman Procurator or Governor of Judaea. The story we are going to be considering took place in Jerusalem at the Praetorium, the home of Pilate. We will have several things to contemplate, beginning with the announcement of Pilate to those gathered there early on that Friday morning: “Behold the man.” Pilate probably never knew, but this likely was the most monumental, naive understatement by any man in all of time. To the agitated and determined crowd of Jews screaming for his blood, Jesus was not the awaited Messiah; he was only a man. Pilate was very unhappy that he had been put in the situation and truly had no concern about anything other than his position with the Roman government, so he said: “Jesus is just a man,” but in truth He was the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living

God. He is the most divine, the most illustrious, the most important living soul to ever set foot on earth. However, to the Jews at this time, he was nothing more than a fake, a criminal whose followers were increasing in numbers by the day, and they were becoming fearful of Him and his influence over the people. Pilate was speaking directly to God, questioning the Creator of all that exists, and recognized Him only as another man. Before we deal with this misnomer further, let’s give some thought to Pilate.

We stated previously that Pilate was unhappy about being in the situation before him. Why? His position was an appointed one. Tiberius made him Procurator in 26 CE. (The New Bible Dictionary-Douglas). He was in charge of the province and was responsible to the Roman government for anything that happened there. He was in a formidable state of affairs. The Jews were boisterous and disorderly,

bordering on violence, and he couldn't let this happen. They wanted Jesus to be put to death. He had examined Jesus twice, and he stated "I find in him no fault at all" and "what evil hath he done?" As Matthew wrote, Pilate knew that it was because of envy that they had delivered him. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent of all charges and wished to release him. However, he knew if he did release Jesus, there would be an uproar; the Jewish mob would become more agitated and unruly, and it would be likely the Roman soldiers would have to step in and deal with the situation. Pilate did not want this to happen. Also, Pilate's wife sent word to him saying: "have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19). Tradition states that Pilate's wife, Procula, was led by that dream to become a Christian. We do not have biblical proof, but it is a pleasant thought. Failing to heed the warning from his wife, and after questioning Jesus again, Pilate ushered Jesus out of the judgment hall and said to the intractable crowd: "Behold the man." His intentions were to hopefully make them think. Not just a quick glance at Jesus but to think, to comprehend and give consideration to this thing you are requesting. You are seeking the most brutal death for this man who is innocent by my decree; I have told you this yet another time. Still, they continued screaming for Jesus to be crucified. His question, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" They demanded again: let him be crucified. Giving in to their demands, Pilate had Jesus scourged and gave him over to them for crucifixion.

At that time, Pilate "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (Matthew 27:24). This feeble attempt to absolve himself from complicity in this mockery of justice was totally ineffective and meaningless. Unfortunately for him, his name is only remembered and recorded in history as a moral coward. He did not have the courage to stand for what he knew to be the truth and gave

the Son of God to an angry mob to be crucified.

His question about what to do with Jesus has echoed down through the years to the present day and is still just as much a challenging thought as when it was uttered by Pilate. From secular history, we are told that Pilate was later charged with murdering a group of Samaritans. He was ordered to go to Rome to answer the charges before the Emperor. Tiberius died before Pilate saw him, so we do not know the result of that trip (Josephus Antiquities 18.4-2). Several older writers claim Pilate was forced to commit suicide, but we have no definitive proof this is true. What we do know without question is that Jesus was abused, beaten with sticks, spat upon, slapped scourged to near death, and then forced to bear His cross to Golgotha, and there put to death.

Is it possible we could number the times we have read that account? Not probable that we could; it is that important. The story relates the depth of God's love, the extent of His mercy, and the flood of His grace that was and continues to be poured out on mankind that He created. This brings to mind another consideration with which we need be concerned. Pilate said: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ"?

This was not a question about which Pilate alone needed to make a decision. It is a question that has haunted mankind since before the time of Jesus on earth to this present day; so it is not a new thing. It was a part of God's plan before he created all that exists. It is a question each and every person that has lived on this earth will of necessity have to face. Whether we choose to deal with it or try to ignore it, it is a certainty we will one way or another, sooner or later. David knew this a thousand years before the advent of our Savior. "The Lord shall judge the people" (Psalm 7:8). Some hundreds of years after this, Isaiah stated: "For the Lord is our judge" (Isaiah 33:22). Throughout the times of the prophets and into the days of the Apostles, it has been heralded. It is incumbent upon us; we have no choice but to make a decision. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO

WITH JESUS THAT IS CALLED CHRIST?

The Apostle Paul writing to the Philippians:

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him [Christ], and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:9-11.

Did we notice the option in that statement? No, there is no option, it was not a discretionary issue, it is plain and simple fact. A few years after the gospel was preached for the first time, Peter told the people at Caesarea: “And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42). Paul to the Romans: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16). James wrote: “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” (James 2:12). In all of God’s word, do we find an escape from judgment? No, not at all. In all of God’s word, do we find that each of us are allotted a certain amount of time to make decisions about what we wish to do with God’s greatest blessing, the Savior Jesus Christ? This writer has not found any such pronouncement. If we ignore this gift to what can we look forward? “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). There can be no question about Paul’s statement. Without Christ in our lives, there will be no hope, joy, or crown of righteousness. We must deal with this; ignore it and have absolutely nothing of worth, put it off too long and be lost.

Paul pointed out to the Romans that some of the Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God. They pictured the long awaited Messiah quite differently than what Jesus presented to the world. Paul said whether or not they believed did not affect the truth; their disbelief did not make the

faith of God without effect. “For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Romans 3:3). One may tell a lie a thousand times; so many times you might begin to believe it yourself, but it does not alter the fact that a lie is a lie and will never be truth. Conversely, it matters not in the least if we deny truth or evade dealing with truth and pretend it does not exist or that it does not pertain to us, we are just kidding ourselves. We are dodging the issues because truth is truth and cannot be changed to a lie. We may believe there is no hell and deny that Jesus was the sacrifice to overcome the sins of mankind. Many do, but it does not change truth nor relieve us of our responsibility of determining what we intend to do about Jesus. When the Holy Spirit revealed that every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that Jesus is the Lord, it wasn’t an off-the-wall thought to pass some time; it was and is a fact which all mankind must hear and believe; and if one does not believe, it does not change truth. When Jesus sent the Apostles to the world to preach, He said those who believe and are baptized will be saved. What about those who do not believe? Jesus said they will be condemned. Idle talk? Not at all, just truth.

Listen to the words of Jesus.

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of His glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Matthew 25:31-34.

When He comes again, he will be judging and sorting: those on the right will inherit the Kingdom, are in God’s family and in Heaven with God the Father, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit for endless existence, eternity. So what else did Jesus say?

“Then shall He say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Christ is coming again for this specific purpose. Where will we be?

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.”

John 5:28-29.

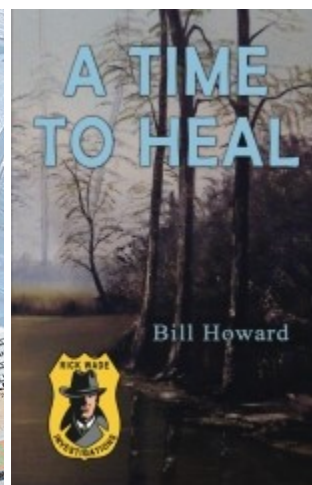
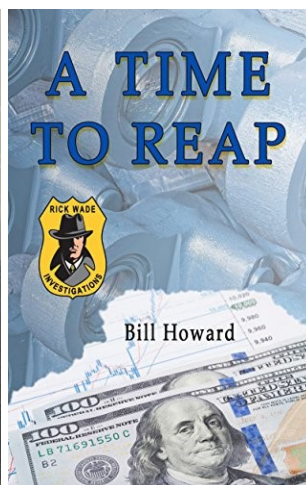
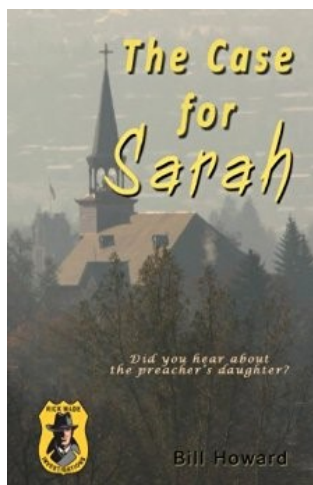
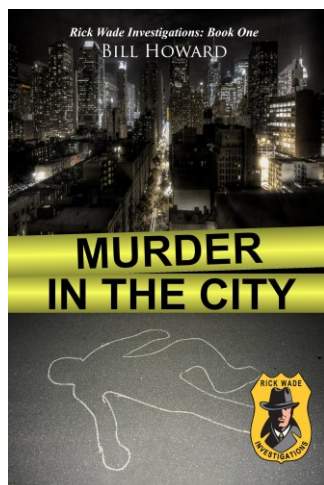
“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

So, there it is. All truth: do we find any statement that says some will not have to heed, some will not have to believe, some will not have to bow to Jesus, some will not be judged? No.

In this life, what we decide to do with Jesus affects everything in our daily living. In this life, what we decide to do with Jesus affects everything we will experience in eternity. BEHOLD THE MAN: That statement has reverberated down through the halls of time, since Jesus was on earth to this present day. We must behold the man, see what He is, what He has done, and recognize that everything was and is done for our benefit. See the man when he is God and created the universe; see the man when He is in heaven and decides to manifest himself as The Son of God and come to earth to be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind and suffer the brutal death on the cross; see the man as he is buried and resurrected and speaks again with the disciples. See the man as He ascends into heaven and sits at the right hand of God and is celebrated as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and then decide what you will do with Jesus which is called Christ.

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QUOTES TO CONTEMPLATE

A Prayer To Consider

"Lord thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old. Keep me from becoming talkative, and from thinking that I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody else's affairs. Keep my mind free from recital of endless detail, give me wings to get to the point. I ask for enough grace to listen to the tales of others pains. Help me to endure them with patience. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains, they are becoming greater, and my love for telling them grows sweeter as the years go by. Teach me to learn that I may be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet, I do not want to be a saint, some of them are so hard to live with, but a sour old person is one of the grounds of the devil. Make me thoughtful, but not moody. Helpful, but not bossy. With my great store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends at the end."

Quoted by the moderator, *Crowe-Kieran Debate*.

On Religious Traditions

Many people cling to the old ways, always, simply because they are old ways, while others contend for everything that is new without stopping to inquire whether it has anything but novelty to commend it.

(Unknown)¹

On Large vs. Small Congregations

It is this glorying in institutional splendor and magnificence regardless of personal comfort and convenience that causes religious people to want to belong to the biggest church and to worship in the

¹ I saved the quote years ago, but neglected to mark where I found it or who wrote it.—*Editor*.

finest house in the city. To maintain such magnificence in the ecclesiastic institution, people will submit to many personal and spiritual inconveniences and abuses. It is universally acknowledged that, as a rule, there is less brotherly love, spiritual fervor, personal consecration, and social enjoyment in a big church and a magnificent house, than in a humbler, smaller institution. Besides, it costs money, which people of ordinary circumstances can ill afford, injustice to themselves and their families, to maintain such magnificence. Why should religious people burden themselves financially, despise the poor, condemn unostentatious worship, glory in a big church, rejoice in a costly house, run after ritualistic pomp, and make a show of expensive paraphernalia in religion in general, rather than enjoy richer spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, with less show and far lighter personal burdens?

(Unknown)²

On Salvation and Baptism

God is able to save without Baptism... But in the church we must judge and teach, in accordance with God's ordered power, that without outward Baptism no one is saved.

Martin Luther, *Works*, 3:274

On the Sword of the Spirit

It is said that the Word is the sword that the Holy Spirit uses. Rather, the Word of God is the sword that the Holy Spirit forged for us to use. The Spirit does not wield the sword — we ourselves wield it, and if we do not wield it, then it will not be wielded

Foy E. Wallace Jr.

Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit

² Like the previous quotation, I neglected to write down where I found this quotation.—*Editor*.

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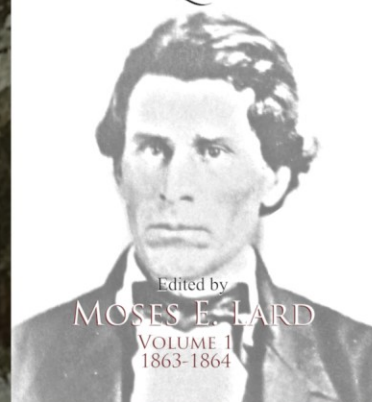
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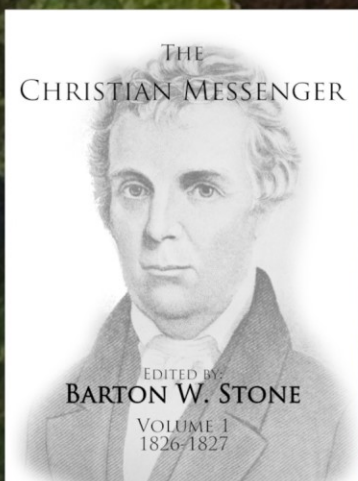
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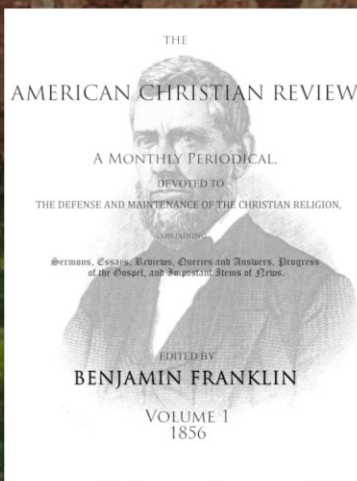
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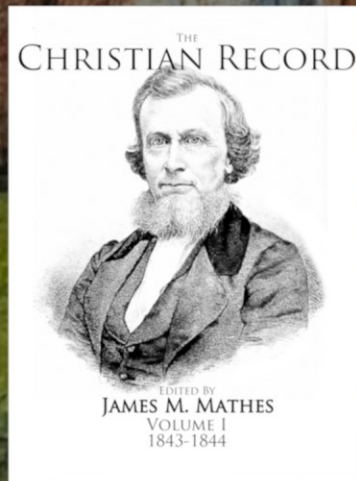
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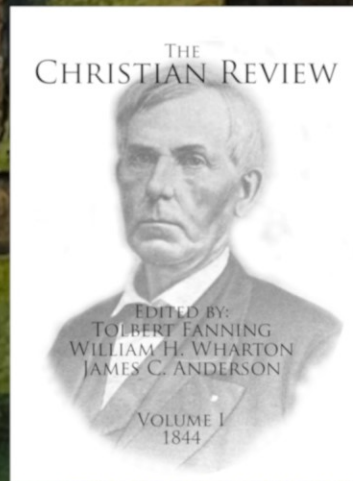
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WHAT LOVE Does

John Krivak

Love and sin function within the socio-spiritual ecosystem of Christian theology. Each is felt in the relationships shared with God or with other people. In fact, we might apply working definitions based on relational functioning. Sin is a failure of relational obligation, which damages or destroys the partnership. Love is the honoring of these same obligations, which brings success and fulfillment. This approach is validated by the identification of love as the fulfillment of the two greatest commands (Matthew 22:35-40). And also, from the Fall (Genesis 3) onward, God works mightily to overcome sin's damage. Relationships are always the focus when love and sin get attention. The objective here is to clarify the interworking of love and sin in the making of saints.

Sanctification is making people holy in regards to sin, and there are two processes to achieve holiness. The first process is obvious; the second process is easily missed altogether. Sanctification results when the Cross-shed blood of Jesus atones for sins al-

ready committed. Everybody knows that, right? But this second process gets zero recognition. Sanctification also results when Christians find power to resist sin and temptation, so that sin never happens.

In one process, contamination by sin is cleansed and removed. In the other, contamination is prevented. Which process is better? Which would please God more? Consider the differences. The first process begins with sins committed, with several results:

- You have shamed or disgraced yourself.
- You have angered and saddened God.
- You have hurt other people (rarely is sin victimless).
- You have made it all the more necessary for Jesus to take the Cross.

However, when sin is prevented, all of this damage is avoided! The second process of sanctification is clearly superior.

The obvious problem is that humanity is famously weak in the face of sin. No one has the strength to

prevent sin from doing its damage. We all fall, and need to be cleansed, again and again, by the blood of Jesus—the first type of sanctification. Yet the New Testament bears witness to an available power source capable of winning against sin: the Holy Spirit! Those who possess the Spirit as an indwelling power can be sanctified so as to prevent sin. They are called saints, and Paul would refer to them as “those who live by the Spirit.” All others live in weakness as “those who live according to the flesh”.

Also against “sinless sanctification” is Reformed theology. Christians are only allowed “positional righteousness.” Even after conversion, depravity persists and prevents righteous and holy living. Sin riddles the lives of the saints, but righteousness is imputed to them because of their position “in Christ.” A *crux interpretum* is Romans 7. There, Paul describes his own experience against hopeless unrighteousness. Sin dominates him. Paul is heard to describe a situation that grips all Christians. His only hope (and our only hope) is Jesus, which brings us back to the first process for sanctification. But the Reformed interpretation fails. It jams contradiction against the pervasive Christian triumphalism in the New Testament. Chapter 7 may feature “hopeless unrighteousness,” but chapter 6 and chapter 8 insist that Christians can (indeed, must) win over sin!

A third hindrance against triumphal Christian sanctification is that the two processes are pitted against each other. Why bother to fight against sin, when we have Jesus to fight for us? Isn't the first process enough? Or, we worry that the second process amounts to self-righteousness. In the end, the crucifixion of Jesus will be robbed of significance and Christians will become Pharisees.

Let's be honest. We wear blinders that prevent us from seeing triumphal Christian sanctification, even though it is pervasive in NT Scripture. For example, see if you can spot it here:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess

his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

(1 Thessalonians 4:3–8)

Paul presents the expectation of holy living not as a wish, but a commandment (vs. 1-2). The demand is possible—not for all Gentiles, but only for Christian Gentiles. There is no hint of hopeless unrighteousness, but hopeful expectation that is tied to God's gift of the Holy Spirit. In this passage, the second process is featured. Sin need not be forgiven; it will be prevented. The word for this (again) is sanctification.

Back to Romans now, this empowered sanctification surrounds the tiny island of chapter 7. Chapter 6 begins, “*Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*” (Romans 6:1–2). Protestants expect that sin will continue unabated! But Paul declares that sin no longer is the Christian's slave-master. In fact, the “old self” (that had been dominated) has died and been replaced. This is “new birth” language. And as in Thessalonians, the power to achieve this holy transformation is the Holy Spirit. That is chapter 8. This powered capability is available to all Christians, since they “live according to the Spirit.” All others are consigned to failure because they still “live according to the flesh.” The flesh is weak; the Spirit brings power. Shouldn't we conclude that the impotent failure (that Paul describes in chapter 7) belongs to pre-Christian experience? Christians win over sin.

My sense of things is that the Reformed Protestant perspective neutralizes and negates the Thessalonian text (above), as well as Romans 6 and 8. That means that the first process of sanctification (through the cleansing atonement of Jesus) actually

eclipses the second process (through the victorious empowerment of the Spirit). There are many other texts that “we cannot see” even when we read them, over and over. Each one gives its testimony and validates the second way to sanctification:

- *“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:20). This should be heard as a demand for positive righteousness—not the very public honor that Pharisees desired (even over hidden sin-shame that only God can see). Jesus is looking for sins prevented.
- *“Or, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Like this one, many texts testify to the “before and after” realities that attend Christian conversion. These testify to a thorough win-over-sin that is a preventative (rather than only a corrective through the Cross). The Spirit works this sanctification.
- *“He who steals must steal no longer”* (Ephesians 4:28). The thief who becomes a Christian is a thief no longer—he has been sanctified!
- There are many texts that attach the threat of damnation to domination by sin. These threats tie Protestant theology in knots! They expect the first process to resolve all sin issues, and thus do not see sin in a Christian’s life to be any threat. Hebrews is full of these scary threats: *“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment”* (10:26–27). There is no room here for

“positional righteousness.” The sacrifice of Jesus (first process) will not cleanse these sins. The Christian must win over these sins (second process), and this is made explicit: *“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord”* (12:14).

Still, the first process blinds us and makes the second process invisible. There seems to be an iron-clad logic that if any sin continues, that proves Christians are incapable of sanctified living. The second process to holiness must align with perfectionism. Either that, or any sin-failure forces a default to the first process—and in fact, this sin disproves the Spirit’s sanctification. Any who promote a Christian win-over-sin must demonstrate a win that is total and complete. But no one can claim absolute triumph:

“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous 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.”

(1 John 1:8–10).

This sounds like advocacy of first-process sanctification and like denial of second-process, right?

However, if the author (John) intends to argue along such lines, how could he go on to write declarations that clearly represent the second-process? All of these are found in the same epistle:

- *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1:6).
- *“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin”* (2:1).
- *“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we*

know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (2:3–6).

- *“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” (2:29).*
- *“And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (3:3).*
- *“No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (3:6–10).*

I would bet that those in “Christendom” today (especially Protestants) quote the first-process texts of 1 John, a hundred to one, over the large number for second-process. Obviously, readers are to hold together both emphases (as the author does). Neither is to be absolutized. The first process does not allow that the crucified Lord will forgive those who sin without any restraint. The second process does not demand Spirit-empowered perfectionism. The Spirit-process does not replace the Jesus-process, making it *passee* or obsolete. Even those with lives changed (by new birth of water and Spirit) need to re-visit the Cross for cleansing. In spite of these sins, it cannot be denied that life has been changed and that a victory has been won. If any argue for a contradiction between the two ways to sanctification, so that one annuls the other, his misunderstanding is obvious. Jesus and the Spirit work cooperatively—yet each by different process—to separate

the saint from sin.

Now, where does love function in all of this? The process begins with a Christian who has died with Jesus to enable new birth. Power is given by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and love is the mechanism by which that power works to achieve sanctification. Love is the very antidote of sin. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, and *“the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Romans 5:5). When love fills the heart, sin is prevented. The one who loves does not sin; the one who sins does not love.

This may be illustrated in the 1 Thessalonians text that we began with. Gentiles, living by the flesh, sinned sexually without regard for God or people. But when the Spirit filled their hearts with love, the same sins became impossible. The dynamics changed. Love for spouse ruins fornication with any other. Love for all other people disallows selfish use of them as “sex objects.” Sin has no place in loving fellowship: *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart”* (1 Peter 1:22). And it’s not just sexual sin. Love will not allow theft, slander, hostility, murder. Try it—let the Spirit fill your heart with Christ’s love, with God’s love. The same power that worked the Resurrection will begin its work in you. Try to sin when your heart is full of love—it cannot be done. To put it simply, *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13:10). The Law of God never achieves its purpose unless love fills the heart. Where there is love, sin dies and people become holy. They cannot sin; they can *not* sin.

Jesus offers a way to holiness that removes sin; and the Spirit offers a way to holiness that prevents sin. Love is the power for each process. The Spirit’s work never removes the need for the Cross, and Jesus opens the door for the Spirit’s working. Every saint needs the Savior and the Spirit to win over sin.

This is what love does.





THOU SHALT NOT STEAL

Johnny O. Trail

Just about any person who has internet access gets emails containing fraudulent messages attempting to trick a person into sending money to a third party or giving over sensitive account information. This has become commonplace, and it is disturbing on many different levels. A few days ago, I received one such email.

The sender had secured the email information of a trusted, well-respected Bible instructor. Suffice it to say that this man is a good friend, and I immediately opened his email in anticipation of the message he wanted to share. The communication was peppered with language that might persuade one to believe that this was a “bible oriented” person.

In part, it read, “Brother, would you be willing to purchase an *Amazon* card and send it to sister _____ who is struggling with terminal cancer? For whatever reason, I have had some trouble getting my check card to complete this transaction.

If you will purchase this gift card and send me the account information, I will reimburse you for the expenditure. I want to brighten her day and put a smile on her face.” The sender even referenced Galatians 6:10 which says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

From the beginning, it was apparent that someone had stolen his email for the purpose of defrauding people of their money. I contacted my former Bible instructor’s wife within the day, and she said that they had already received over fifty calls about other people receiving the same email scam. I remarked to her that this thief “knew our nomenclature.” It is sad that a charlatan would use biblical terms (like “brother”) and passages of scripture to cheat people out of their hard-earned money.

One day later, the email scammer sent another message that simply said, “Any progress yet?” I

started to reply, “Yes, I have forwarded all of the information over to the cyber fraud division in our county, and they should be contacting you shortly.” Instead, I decided to let things go and conserve my energy.

Sadly, using religion and status to cheat people out of their earnings is not new to our age. Judas Iscariot was of this ilk. John 12:6 says, “This he [Judas] said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.” Faith “healers” and various televangelists seem to thrive off the practice of fleecing their followers for money on a continual basis.

I marvel at the amount of time, energy, and effort that people in our world put into defrauding others. If they spent the same measure of effort into earning an honest living, they would most likely be wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. These efforts have moved from mail, phone, email, and now texting people to hoodwink individuals into relinquishing their savings to thieves. What a sad way for people to earn a living!

There is no shame in earning an honest living no matter what occupation a person has. We are to earn our livings by the sweat of our brows (Genesis 3:19). If one is unwilling to work, he should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Finally, one who does not provide for his family is worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). Scripture never condones stealing as a means of earning a living for oneself or his family.

Instead of quoting scriptures that encourage Christians to do good things (Galatians 6:10), these email scammers might consider reading the parts of the Bible that discuss stealing and the fate of those who continue to practice such a lifestyle (Revelation 21:8).

The author of the aforementioned email needs to understand that stealing is something that one can stop doing and repent from practicing. 1 Corinthians 6:9 says:

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be de-

ceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

While most are quick to condemn these types of theft, there are other forms of theft that remain unmentioned. With many people, cheating the government out of taxes is a commonplace practice. We are expected to be honest in our dealings with the government, even if they are not always honest in what they promote. Luke 20:22-25 says:

“Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?” They answered and said, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Finally, employee theft is commonly practiced by many in our society. It is the area where most businesses incur losses to their business. The Bible calls upon Christians to work in such a way to please God rather than men. Colossians 3:22-23 says:

“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.”

While these passages address the relationship that should exist between a bondservant and a master, the modern implication is that we should work for our employers just as we would work for the Lord. Would a good, Christian man seek to rob God? By no means!

Christians should always be honest in their dealings with others—even if those others are dishonest with us. We should never seek to steal something that does not belong to us or take advantage of unsuspecting individuals.

LORD, THAT I MIGHT RECEIVE MY SIGHT

Bill Howard

These were the words spoken to Jesus by one who was blind and believed that Jesus had the answer to his dilemma. Jesus was on His last trip to Jerusalem. He has stated to the followers: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the gentiles” (Mark 10:33). As they were departing Jericho, He heard the voice of a man sitting by the side of the highway, begging. It was the voice of a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus. The account tells us there were a great number of people surrounding Jesus, and without a doubt a lot of conversation taking place, and it is safe to guess that this is how Bartimaeus learned it was Jesus that the multitude was following. Having this awareness of the Lord, he cried out: “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!”¹ As Jesus continued the journey toward Jerusalem, He was well aware of what he would endure before very long. He had the weight of the sins of the world. He had a dread for the suffering He must accept, but He had a mission to be fulfilled for His Father; yet he still had concern for those who needed His help now. Bartimaeus was cautioned to be silent, but

Jesus had heard his plea and called for him to come forward. Jesus’ questioned: “what wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” (Mark 10:51). The man requested, “that I might receive my sight,” and Jesus told him: “Thy faith hath made thee whole,” and immediately he received his sight.

Those of us who have been privileged to have our sight can only guess at the joy and exhilaration one would feel to first be blind and then, because of a miracle from God, to have vision. Quite likely Bartimaeus had heard many times stories of the Jesus who healed those who were ill, healed the blind man at Bethsaida, made whole those who had leprosy, caused the crippled and maimed to be able to walk, and perhaps he even heard the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead back to life or the widow’s son being restored to life as Jesus approached Nain. Whatever else he knew, he was aware that he was to a great degree helpless. He had to be miserable because of his limitations, but believed that what had been done for others could be done for him. He believed Jesus could restore his sight, and in faith he requested, and he received. Jesus did so many healings and miracles in his short time on earth that it was not possible to record all of them. John wrote: “and there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25).

There are several excellent lessons which may be garnered from this story, but there are three that we will dwell on as we give more consideration to the event. One, Jesus stood still and waited for Barti-

¹ Matthew 20:30 states there were two blind men. This apparent discrepancy has caused some conversation between scholars, but it is not likely to be in error. It is highly likely there were two blind men; Mark probably just used the name of Bartimaeus to give account. Perhaps it was the only name that came to be known at the time, but whichever is the case, it does not in any way make a difference in the lesson. The mention of one does not exclude the fact of the other

maeus to approach; two, when called, the man cast aside everything and hastened to receive the blessing. It will be well for each of us to give some thought to these two along with a glaring truth about which we should give liberal consideration, and that is: there is a blindness much worse than literal blindness.

The certainty of a Messiah coming into the world was first hinted at when Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden of Eden. Perhaps, as much as thirteen hundred years later, Isaiah prophesied concerning the virgin birth of a Son who would be called Immanuel. Throughout the Old Testament, there were prophecies of the coming Messiah.

The Angel told Joseph that the baby conceived by Mary was of the Holy Spirit, and the name was to be Jesus (which means, literally, Jehovah is salvation, or Jehovah saves), because he would save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). This is what Matthew was speaking of: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23. Read Isaiah 7:14). This was not just some sort of happenstance; this was pre-planned before the world was created. Man brought sin and death into the world, and there had to be a sacrifice made for those sins. Jesus suffered a brutal death on the cross so that sin and Satan could be overcome and man could be cleansed of sin and become a child of God. To reign with him in eternity, where there is no end to time. Just as Jesus was patiently waiting for Bartimaeus to come, He, for the last two thousand years, has been waiting for mankind to come to Him for salvation. The single greatest blessing ever offered to man. Peter makes it known that God does not want to lose anyone to sin and Satan but He desires all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Jesus tells us that if we wish to come to the Father, it can only be accomplished through Him. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me" (John 14:6). "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Reve-

lation 3:20). As Jesus patiently waited for Bartimaeus, He patiently waits for all mankind to come to Him now. How long would Jesus have waited on Bartimaeus to come to him? We have no idea. How long will Jesus wait for mankind to come to Him for the saving power He has offered? We have no way of knowing, but we do know the time will run out sooner or later. Peter tells us the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night! How much warning does that allow? Paul told the Thessalonians that Jesus shall be revealed "from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ": also, that "He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (Read First Thessalonians 4 and Second Thessalonians 1). When Jesus returns, the time of making preparation no longer exists. More on this thought shortly.

Looking again at the story of Bartimaeus gives us another thought worthy of consideration. He, knowing it was Jesus, did not hesitate to call on Him. "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." If there is hope, it calls for immediate action. It is possible this would be the only chance for him to make contact with the Healer, and he was not going to let it slip by him; he called out to Jesus. He was cautioned to be silent, but Jesus had heard his plea. He commanded him to be called. The text tells us: "and he, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus." There was no delay, nothing about which to ponder; it called for immediate action, and Bartimaeus took action right then and there. He was not "almost persuaded"; there was no waiting for a "more convenient time." He threw off any hindrance, rose and answered the call immediately. The Greek word used here literally means he sprang to his feet. He was beckoned to have audience with Jesus; he had hope for healing, and nothing was going to delay him. The blind must depend on someone to lead them to wherever they need. The blind are to some degree an outcast from society because of their limitations. They must depend on others for support, or at least to supplement their

support; they would have very limited means. Blindness creates many problems on which we have no need of elaborating further: we fully comprehend the hindrance. His request to Jesus: “Lord that I may have my sight” was honored immediately by the Lord; he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way. What an amazing account of one of the Lord’s miracles! What a beautiful story of God’s love and willingness to heed the needs of mankind, and we will elaborate further on this as we bring the writing to its end.

Earlier, we had made the statement that there are worse things than being physically blind. That is an absolute. Physical blindness is inconvenient, but can be dealt with—and many do so. However, there are other areas in which people can be blind (not physically) that means total devastation at the end of time, to say nothing of that which is detrimental while we have our time this side of Jesus’ return. Whether or not we take time to think about it and recognize it, Jesus’ brutal death on Golgotha was the most magnificent and meaningful event that can be comprehended by the human mind—it ranks in importance with the Creation. Simply stated, it is the outpouring of God’s love for the creature He created. So why is it so meaningful? It is so because there is an end to physical life on earth which will bring about a separation of mankind, one from another. It is so because there is truly a heaven and a hell and each and every one of us will be relegated to an eternity in hell or be rewarded with life everlasting in that place that Jesus has prepared for those who love Him and do His will. Far too many people are blinded to this truth. It doesn’t fit their ideas so they refuse to accept the truth, but that changes nothing, they are blinded in their heart and mind. Paul wrote of this blindness to the Corinthians and the Ephesians (2 Corinthians 3:14 and Ephesians 4:18) and if this is what people wish to choose, God can blind the mind of those who refuse to believe (2 Corinthians 4:4). It is not what God wishes, but he created man with the ability to make decisions, and if we intend to be obedient to His will, it will be

because that is what we want more than anything else. He does not force obedience on anyone. Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice in order for mankind to be rescued from sin and desolation. If we are blinded to the full meaning of this, we will be lost.

Every child of God must think on these things and act accordingly. Are we truly dedicated to having the privilege of eternity in the presence of God? Are we prone to go through the motions like a mechanical repetition once in a while when it is convenient? Jesus didn’t suffer the cross just for something to do. He left heaven for a reason and His purpose was weighty and serious. He shed His blood, and that and that alone will cleanse us from sin and assure us of heaven. We must be just as serious about our life in obedience—halfway measures will not suffice.

Every person outside of Christ must deal with the same truths. If you are outside of Christ and His Kingdom, the church, you are in grave danger now and forever. Let’s not pull any punches; those outside of Christ are bound for hell. There is no pretty way of stating the truth; facts are facts. Christ gave His life to give life and gives each the opportunity to achieve salvation through Him. He stands at the door of our heart seeking entrance, but each have the responsibility of opening that door. Those who have not answered Jesus’ call to salvation need to be like Bartimaeus, cast aside any hindrance and rush to Jesus. *He* was only dealing with blindness; *we* are dealing with the end of life here on earth and the circumstances we will face, eternity with God or an eternity of suffering. Now is there any intelligent reason to delay becoming a child of God? Do not search for a convenient time, it isn’t out there, you create it yourself. We must clear our hearts and minds of blindness, open our eyes to the light of Jesus’ word and become children of God through faith in Him and being baptized into Christ and added to His Kingdom.

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation”

2 Corinthians 6:2b.

The Church AND the Gospel Age

Stanley Sherman

To determine the beginning date of Christ's New Testament/Covenant, the same date as the start of the preaching of the gospel and the immediate establishment of the Lord's church of Christ with 3000 converts, we look at the dates associated with Roman rulers of the time (Daniel 2:44). Thus, Jesus being born during Herod's reign, historian scholars estimate Jesus' birth between 6 and 2 BC. John the Baptist began preaching in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, which would have been around 27 AD. He baptized Jesus and was beheaded by Herod's son (Herod Antipas) in 29 AD. Thus, Jesus began His ministry probably in 28 AD at age 30 (Luke 3:23) and was crucified, according to researchers, "most likely April 3, 33 AD, which was the same day as the lunar eclipse of April 3, 33 AD (as alluded to in Matthew 27:45; Acts 2:14-21; and Tertullian 190 AD)," although others think it was a special supernatural event probably in March.

The church was established in 33 AD on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Christ's resurrection (Acts 2). Of course, the church was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4; 2:10). His Word is the seed of the kingdom, the church (Luke 8:11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23). Whenever and wherever the gospel would be taught, and obeyed by those who believed, repented, and were

baptized into Christ, the church would exist, because the church is people who have become Christians (Acts 2; Hebrews 5:8-9; Romans 10:17; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32; Acts 2:13; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:1-8; 16-17).

Jesus taught that his kingdom, the church, would never be destroyed (Matthew 16:18; Daniel 2:44).

Jesus taught that there would be but one church (John 10:16; Eph.4:4; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18) and that there should be no divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10), but should be unified in Him (John 17:21-23).

His people become Christians, members of His Body, through faith (Romans 10:17), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of faith (Matthew 10:32), and baptism (immersion, Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:1-8; 16-17).

The church upholds the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice (John 4:24; 1 Timothy 3:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). God planned the church to follow the blueprint (Hebrews 8:5), the New Testament pattern, making it simple enough (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) that the church can exist and spread anywhere on earth (without formal denominational structure or bureaucratic hierarchy). In its assemblies, it engages in prayer, singing, observing the Lord's Supper (communion), giving, and Bible

study. It looks to Jesus as the only head and founder, and follows the Lord's governing pattern of elders as spiritual shepherds and deacons as serving each independent congregation.

Because the church is eternal, it is even traceable in every century since 33 AD. This is only sensible and logical—as people spread the simple gospel through evangelism, the New Testament pattern has been duplicated in doctrine and practice. Among the many historians who have tracked the church through the centuries, two European Bible and church historians have done us great favors with their work. Keith Sisman of Great Britain, in his book *Traces of the Kingdom* tracked church of Christ congregations in the United Kingdom from the first century to the present. Hans Grimm (German scholar and church historian) wrote *Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe*, tracking the church's spread through Europe and Africa in each century. In spite of the

hatred of the Catholic church toward Christians who chose not to join their heretical ranks or submit to their stranglehold control over the society of the day and even governments, these Christians who rejected Catholicism had preserved the New Testament pattern of the Lord's true church since its beginning. Its ranks swelled and spread with the teaching of the gospel, free of innovation or changes made by men. Even many Catholic priests left Catholicism to embrace New Testament Christianity.

Enemies of Christianity censored any writings favorable to the Lord's church in order to erase its existence from history, which explains why so little of the church's presence comes to light through the centuries.

However, honest church history scholars, dedicated to revealing true historical fact, have given us glimpses of New Testament Christians meeting in worship and spreading the gospel in every century from the first to the present. For example:

- 33-100 AD** — From Jerusalem throughout the Roman world (Col. 1:23) — Asia, Europe [including Britain], north Africa.
- 100-200 AD** — Britain
- 200-300 AD** — Syria, Armenia, Arabia. Northwestern Africa
- 300-400 AD** — Spain, France, Palestine Italy, Egypt, Asia Minor
- 400-500 AD** — Britain
- 500-600 AD** — Scotland, England
- 600-700 AD** — Armenia, Britain
- 700-800 AD** — Germany and Europe
- 800-900 AD** — Wales, Kurdistan, Asia Minor, Turkey, Scotland
- 900-1000 AD** — Europe, North Africa
- 1000-1100 AD** — Alsace-Lorraine, Siberia, Armenia, Balkans, Spain, France, Germany, Ukraine
- 1100-1200 AD** — Germany, Netherlands, Alsace-Lorraine, Italy, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Macedonia
- 1200-1300 AD** — Bohemia, France, Far- East, Britain, throughout Europe
- 1300-1400 AD** — Wales, England
- 1400-1500 AD** — Bohemia, Great Britain, Moravia, Austria
- 1500-1600 AD** — England
- 1600-1700 AD** — England, Germany, USA
- 1700-1800 AD** — England, United States
- 1800-1900 AD** — Britain, Germany, USA
- 1900-2000 AD** — Europe, USA, Global
- 2000-Onward** — Worldwide

SERMON STARTER: GOD OF THE NEW— 7 EXAMPLES OF TRUE NEWNESS FROM OUR GOD

Gantt Carter

I. New Things

- A. Overall idea (Isaiah 42:8-10; 43:18-19; 62:1-3).
- B. New song of post-deliverance (Psalm 40:1-3).

II. New Heart/Spirit

- A. Their God – His people (Ezekiel 11:19-21).
- B. His spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27).
- C. Based in repentance (Ezekiel 18:31-32).

III. New Covenant

- A. A different covenant with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- B. Compare with Hebrews 8.

IV. New Life

- A. Buried and then raised in newness (Romans 6:1-6).
- B. A part of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

V. New Humanity

- A. One man (Ephesians 2:11-22).
- B. After His likeness (Ephesians 4:20-24).

VI. New Command

- A. Loving like Jesus (John 13:31-35; 15:12-17).
- B. Old made new (1 John 2:7-11)?

VII. New Heavens/Earth

- A. See Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 and context(s).
- B. Their God – His people (Revelation 21:1-5; cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13 – note connections back to Isaiah and Ezekiel passages from first part above).

Some Closing Thoughts:

1. Lost years made up (Joel 2:25)?
2. Redemption of evil days (Genesis 47:9; 48:15-16).

About the AUTHORS

Hatton Allen is 24 years old and currently serves as one of the Associate Preachers for the Willette church of Christ in Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee. He has been influenced by the Lord's church his entire life. He is a 2019 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. Currently, he is working toward both a Bachelor of Science in Ministry and Bible degree from Amridge University. He is also working toward a Master of Biblical Studies degree from the Bear Valley Bible Institute. It is his goal that his writings might help someone to know Jesus in His way and that many souls would be won.

Jamie Beller lives and works in Oklahoma, preaching any and every chance he gets the opportunity.

Gantt Carter lives with his wife and two children in Elk City, OK, where he preaches for the 2nd & Adams church of Christ. In addition to studying the Bible, he enjoys competition shooting

Gerald Cowan. Outliving contemporaries is not all it's cracked up to be, not necessarily an accomplishment. Some fragile hope persists that something worthwhile may yet be done. My want is not diminished. My how to and my can do often let me down. At the risk of overestimation I want to think I may still find something worth saying, worth repeating while hoping someone else will agree.

Adam Cozort is the proud father of enough boys to make a basketball team. He and his wife (and

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Kyle Frank spends his days reading, writing, texting, praying, singing, and helping others. In addition to being a Civil War expert, he offers digitization services at very reasonable prices. Contact him for more information (KyleDFrank@gmail.com).

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Matthew Shaffer used to live in Brazil... Indiana. He has since left the country. He has been married to Japonica for the last year and a half. He studied German and Classical Greek at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

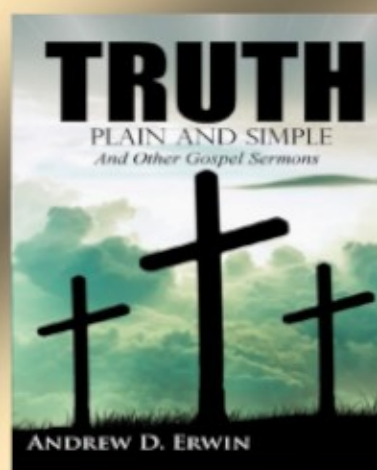
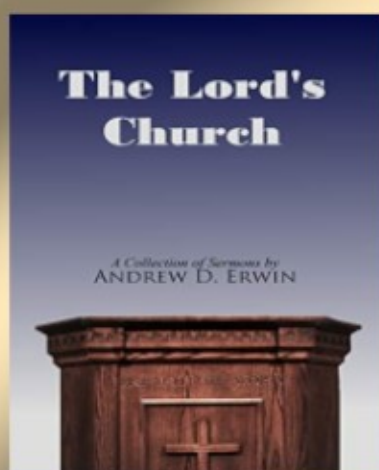
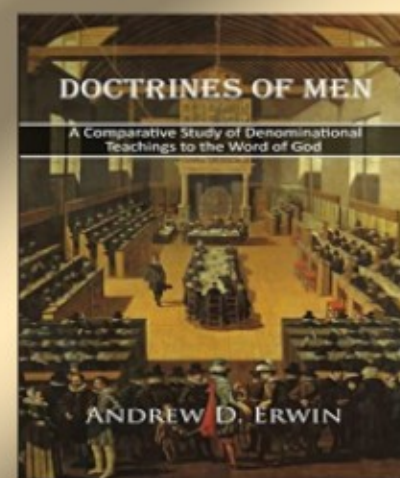
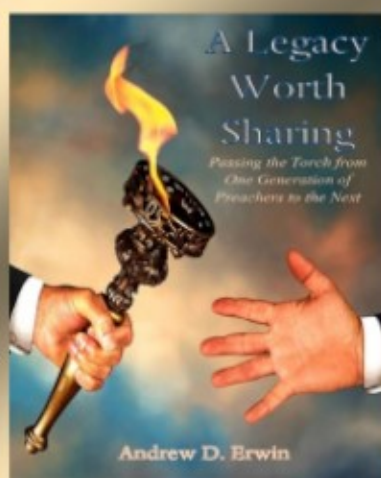
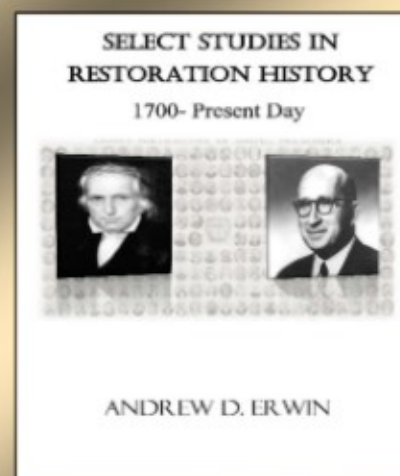
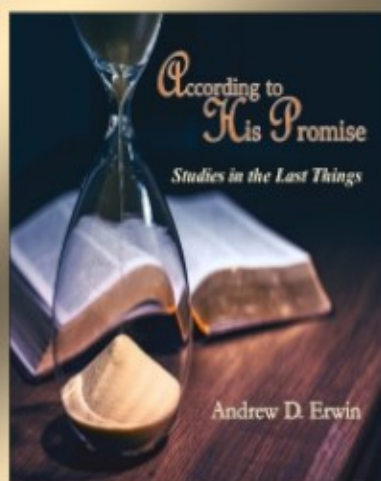
Stanley Sherman has preached for over 50 years, 30 of those in Oregon. He has also conducted evangelism training in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Scotland, Jamaica, Dominica, Antigua, and of course in the United States. He and his wife Lydia have been married 50 years. They have three children and 10 grandchildren, all of whom are homeschooled. His father was a gospel preacher for 70 years.

Johnny O. Trail preaches for the Hillcrest church of Christ in Springfield, Tenn. He has preached the gospel for over 32 years. He and his wife, Jada, have been married for almost 25, and they have three sons Matthew (22), Nathan (20), and Noah (14). He has a B.S. in Political Science from MTSU, a Master of Ministry degree from Freed-Hardeman, and a Master of Divinity from Lipscomb. He completed his Doctorate in Marriage and Family Therapy from Amridge University in 2011. He is a state licensed marriage and family therapist with offices in Murfreesboro (at the Walter Hill church of Christ) and Springfield. He is an instructor at the Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies.

Bradley S. Cobb has written down a long list of things to do this year, including writing more books (perhaps a new Goodweather story), editing more books, republishing more books, and (hopefully) selling more books. He is attempting to be less of a book hoarder this year. He is not looking forward to doing taxes, considering most of the kids no longer give him credit.

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Andy Erwin is the editor of the *Gospel Gleaner* and is actively involved in training preachers around the world.

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"Is Christ Divided?"—PAUL.

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