

Our Greatest Hope

Entertaining Angels

The Anointed of God

Chronological Life of Christ:
Why Four Gospels?

Analyzing "The Water at the
Blue Hole

What It Takes to Be Saved

10 Commandments For Today:
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The Blessings in Christ:
The Family

The Act of Marriage

Sparing Your Enemy

True Bible Scholars

The Image of God

The Quarterly

Vol. 7, No. 2

REAL
DISCIPLES
FIGHT

BRAND NEW

BAPTISM

He that believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Don't you know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (Romans 6:3)

Unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

...According to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Buried with Him in baptism, in which you are also risen with Him through the working of God, who has raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:12).

Baptism does also now save us...

(1 Peter 3:21).

And now why are you waiting? Arise, be baptized, washing away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).

How is water, what hinders me from being baptized? (Acts 8:36)

FAITH

For by faith alone we stand justified (Hebrews 11:1).

Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, because he that comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

...Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works... Because as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (James 2:18, 26).

He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, he that doesn't believe shall be condemned (Mark 16:16).

I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Me, though he had been dead, yet he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26).

UNITY

I pray, for them also who shall believe in Me through their word: that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us, so that the world might believe that you have sent me (John 17:20-21).

Now I beg you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10).

...walk worthy of the calling by which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-3).

You be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

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PRAYER

...the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much (James 5:16).

[Jesus] spoke a parable to them, teaching that people ought always to pray, and not to lose heart (Luke 18:1).

Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

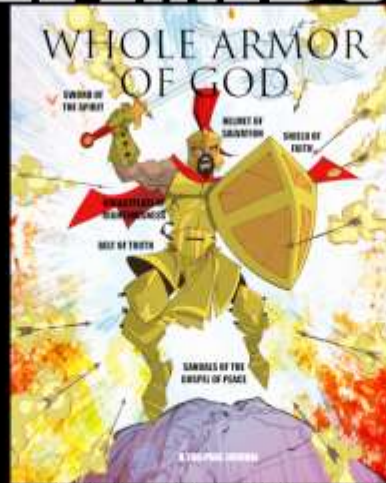
Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it shall be yours (Mark 11:24).

...you don't have because you don't ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:2-3).

And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears (1 John 5:14).

...the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

I encourage you, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all (1 Timothy 2:1).



FORGIVENESS

To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18).

Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

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).

I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sin and their iniquity I will remember no more (Hebrews 8:14).

In [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Then Peter came to them and said, "Lord, how often shall we forgive him that sins against me, and I forgive him? all seven times? Jesus said to him, "I don't say to you, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).

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THE CHURCH

"On this rock, I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

[Jesus] is the head of the body, the church... (Colossians 1:18).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all... (Ephesians 4:4-6).

By one Spirit we were baptized into one body... (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

...the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

...they had appointed elders for them in every church... (Acts 14:23).

The churches of Christ salute you (Romans 16:16).

...to Mount Zion... the heavenly Jerusalem... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven... (Hebrews 12:22-23).



Ask me why
I BELIEVE
in
Jesus

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The Quarterly

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ROUND ROBIN GOSPEL MEETINGS

Have you heard of such a thing? I hadn't until we moved to Charleston, AR. And I have to say, it is great (and I highly recommend other locations give it a go). A group of congregations gets together and has a joint gospel meeting, Monday through Friday. Each night is at a different location, with the local preacher giving the lesson, and the congregation hosting that evening prepares finger foods (or something more elaborate if desired) so there is more opportunity for getting to know brethren from the area after the meeting each night. It keeps congregations from scheduling gospel meetings on the same week. It helps smaller congregations have a gospel meeting when they might not have been able to afford to do so financially. And it helps congregations get closer to each other. Think about it.

In each issue of the *Quarterly*, we like to spotlight our new authors. Ben Mitchell (originally from Alaska) writes a challenging piece on "Sparing Your Enemy," and Chuck Wuchter reminds each of us of the simple plan of salvation found in the Bible.

As you go through this issue, you will see that Real Disciples Fight (which might have been preached at the Round Robin meeting), a look at religious movies and television shows, an analysis of Romans 2, the blessing of our Christian family, and the beginning of a series looking at the Chronological Life of Christ (this series is being posted weekly at TheCobbSix.com).

And of course that isn't anywhere near everything to be found in this issue!

So while you're considering having a Round Robin meeting in your location, take the time to read through these and the many other wonderful articles in this issue. Just turn the page to see what all is inside!

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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REAL DISCIPLES FIGHT



An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

Do you remember last college football season, when the coach of the Arkansas Razorbacks sent a player onto the field during a game barefoot, in shorts and a t-shirt, and no pads? He went in as running back, but seemed rather clueless as to why he was out there. The ball was hiked, the quarterback handed it off to him, he looked down at the ball in his hands and then up at the mean-looking defenders who were inches away from plowing into him. He tried to run, but without the proper shoes, his feet slipped, and he fell hard as he was plowed into by several defensive linemen. His head hit the ground hard, leading to severe trauma. The players landed on top of him, breaking many of his ribs. Oh, and in addition to losing yardage, he also fumbled the ball.

You seriously don't remember this?

That's understandable, as it didn't actually happen.

No one in their right mind would send a player onto the field without the proper equipment, and no player in their right mind would go out there in that condition.

Why?

Because they know the danger that comes from not having yourself protected from the enemy (that being the other team).

The same thing is true for a Christian. And tonight we are going to consider the idea that Christians must be prepared for a fight.

Real Disciples are Soldiers

From the time I was 5 or 6 years old, I remember singing the song, "I'm in the Lord's Army (yes, sir!)." It was a fun song that allowed me to smack my little brother when we sang, "I may never fly o'er the enemy..." But the point of the song is this: Christians are in a war, and we are in the Lord's army.

Twice in Paul's writings he refers to other Christians as either "my fellow-soldier" or "our fellow-soldier." Bonus points if you knew the two were Epaphroditus and Archippus (Philemon 3 and Philippians 2:25). If they were *fellow* soldiers, then Paul viewed himself as a soldier of Christ as well.

Paul told Timothy to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

"Soldier of Jesus Christ" is not a specific role within the church, like elder or deacon, but is a description of *every* Christian.—The problem is, a lot of Christians aren't acting like soldiers.

Real Disciples are Soldiers Who Prepare for a Fight

The church in Ephesus one day received a messenger with a letter from the Apostle Paul. They were anxious to see what Paul had to say, since the last time they had seen him, he told them he would never see their faces again (Acts 20). They probably knew by this point that he had been arrested and was awaiting trial in Rome.

Paul spent every day, day after day, chained to a Roman soldier. And apparently at some point during this imprisonment, he thought, “Now this right here is a visual aid if ever there was one.” So near the end of his letter to the Ephesians (ch. 6:10-18), Paul starts with a military metaphor.

Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Because we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Therefore take to yourself the whole armor of God, so that you might be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Paul makes it quite clear, *There's a war going on!* And on top of that, *You'd better be prepared for it!* Just like our poor, injured, imaginary football player who went onto the field and tried to play without any padding or protection, we too are dead meat if we try to fight this battle without spiritual protection—the whole armor of God.

I've heard some people object to Paul's writings and quote Jesus (out of context), “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were of this world, then my servants would fight.” But because these are the actual words of Jesus, we need to make sure we understand what He meant and what Paul meant.

Jesus meant His disciples were not fighting a physical war for Him.

Jesus' *complete* quote is this: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, *that I should not be delivered to the Jews*. But my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). We are not a physical, carnal, earthly army whose job is to spread the kingdom of Jesus through violence and threatenings. Jesus' kingdom is *not of this world*. It is a *spiritual* kingdom.

This matches perfectly with Paul's statement: “...we do not wrestle (fight) against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Peter weighs in on this as well: “Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Back to Paul's Illustration

It should be abundantly clear, then, that we are in a war—a spiritual war, with Satan as our main enemy, and his minions and messengers right there with him. And after making this point, Paul tells the disciples in Ephesus to make sure they are suited up for the war—because you're in the war, whether you want to be or not.

Take to yourselves the whole armor of God that you might be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

As a quick side note, the idea of the “armor of God” isn't something Paul just made up. He grabbed the idea from Isaiah 59:15-19. In verse 17 of that chapter, we read of a “helmet of salvation” and a “breastplate of righteousness.” But the interesting thing is who is wearing it. This is not figurative armor that God custom makes for His followers—this is God's own armor as He goes out to conquer evil. So when Paul uses this “armor of God” illustration, it's a much more powerful armor than we give it credit.

Therefore stand, having your waist girded with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Countless sermons have been given on the whole armor of God, piece by piece, and we won't go into all the details, but I want you to notice the following things:

1. This armor is *required* if you want to survive the war—and not just survive, but to remain standing at the end of the battle (verse 13).
2. Standing strong throughout this battle requires *truth* (“the truth shall make you free”—John 8:32)
3. Standing strong throughout this battle requires *righteousness* (“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”—Matthew 6:33).
4. Standing strong in this battle requires a continual adherence to the *gospel* (“I declare to you the gospel, which I preached to you, which you also received, and in which you stand; and by which you are saved if you keep in memory what I preached to you”—1 Cor. 15:1-2).
5. Standing strong in this battle requires *faith* (“Without faith it is impossible to please Him; because he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”—Hebrews 11:6).
6. Standing strong in this battle requires a constant remembrance of our *salvation* (“He that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten he was cleansed from his old sins”—2 Peter 1:9).
7. Standing strong in this battle requires we use the *word of God* (And Jesus said to Satan, “It is written...”—Matthew 4).

You might say that this is too much, too difficult, too complicated, and you're not even certain it is enough to protect you. I want to dig even more into the aspects of the armor, but I want you to look just at the shield of faith right now in verse 16. Faith—true belief and trust in Jesus Christ which results in action on our part—that kind of faith is a shield. And the Bible says that faith makes you able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Not *makes you able to survive being shot by the flaming arrows*. Not *makes you able to avoid some of the arrows*. No, God's word says that with faith—true faith—you are able to quench (put out the fire) of all Satan's attacks. Meaning he can try, but *he can't get you*.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7)

Real Disciples Fight the Enemy—Not Each Other

Church splits are far too common; and the saddest part is that the majority of the time it is not over proper adherence to God's word. It is most often done over *personalities*, *power*, or *pride*. A congregation in southern Missouri had a contingent that wanted a steeple on their building. The other side (and I think rightly so) said it wasn't good stewardship of the church treasury to spend the money on having a steeple. The folks that wanted a steeple volunteered to pay for it out of their own pocket. Then the other side dug in their heels and said absolutely not. And as a result, the church there split.

Far too often people who claim to be disciples of Jesus focus their attacks on each other instead of the real enemy—Satan. Some folks want to be the brotherhood police, making sure every person toes the line on every doctrine or risk getting written up in their papers, on their websites, or condemned in their YouTube videos. And if they can't find something *legitimate* to use against the people they don't like, they will make something up.

About a dozen years ago, back when I was on Facebook, I received a challenge from another preacher to do a four-night public debate. The guy making the challenge had kindly (that's sarcasm, by the way) written my stance for me—“Jesus Christ is not God, not eternal, but was created.” My answer was (in essence) *Why on earth would I try to affirm something so idiotic and heretical as to deny the deity of Jesus?* Some people

are so itching for a fight that they will try to force one even if it means making things up about other people to do it.

But what saith the Scripture? Should we be fighting each other?

- John 13:34 – Love one another
- John 15:12 – Love one another
- John 15:17 – Love one another
- Romans 13:8 – Love one another
- 1 Thessalonians 4:9 – Love one another
- 1 Peter 1:22 – Love one another
- 1 John 3:11 – Love one another
- 1 John 3:23 – Love one another (this isn't all the passages that say that)

Or how about this, from the mouth of Jesus:

Neither do I pray for these (apostles) alone, but for those also who shall believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world might believe that You have sent Me (John 17:20-21).

If you invite someone to church, and they come, and then they hear or see members badmouthing each other, do you know how likely they are to come back to hear more of the word of God? Pretty close to zero.

Fighting in the church has caused untold numbers of disciples to leave the church, to leave Jesus, due to discouragement or hurt or anger. Untold numbers of preachers (I know of several) have quit preaching because of passive-aggressive attacks, verbal assaults, undermining of their character—and all of it done by members (and occasionally power-hungry elders) in their congregations.

But Satan loves it. Satan loves to see disciples of Jesus fighting each other, shooting each other in the back, tripping each other—because they are doing his work for him! And when they are fighting each other, they aren't paying attention to his attacks.

Theatres of Warfare

When I started writing this, I gave serious thought to just talking about different areas disciples should be fighting in this war. In WWII there were several “theatres” or locations/areas where the warfare was taking place—the Pacific Theatre, the European Theatre, the African Theatre, even the Alaskan Theatre (yes, WWII battles were even fought in Alaska). Time doesn't permit me to go into detail or to give a complete list, but here are some theatres of war where Satan attacks us and wants us to fail:

- **Forgiveness.** How hard is it for you to consistently apply the words of Jesus to “from your hearts, forgive...every one his brother their trespasses”? (Matthew 18:35).
- **Attendance.** The Covid lockdowns got many people into the habit of skipping church and watching online—and many people just got into the habit of not going to church at all. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and even more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).
- **Marriage.** Husbands love your wives, and wives respect your husbands—that isn't a suggestion or a thing with loopholes—it is a direct command (Ephesians 5:33). It doesn't mean you'll always be happy with them, but God expects us to control our actions and treat each other *always* in loving ways and respectful ways. But Satan wants you to read that verse as “Husbands, demand that your

wife respects you; wives, demand your husbands love you.” You control you, because that’s all you can control.

- I could go on with language, lust, humility, thankfulness, and a host of others, but this will have to do.

Suffice it to say, Satan isn’t fighting a one-front war against disciples of Jesus. He isn’t just coming after you with one temptation in one arena of your life. He wants to overwhelm you, undermine you, make you pay attention in one area so much that you don’t see him coming in from another angle.

That is why Peter said, “Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Are you a Real Disciple?

Real disciples recognize there is a war going on, and they choose to fight on Jesus’ side. They come to Him in obedient faith, repenting of their opposition to Him and His commands; they confess their allegiance to Him, and submit to His command to be baptized—in which He washes away their sins and makes them new.

Real disciples realize this makes them soldiers of Jesus Christ—and that means they have to fight. They fight Satan. They fight for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). They fight against sin in their own lives, and they fight to help rescue injured soldiers as well (“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” Galatians 6:1-2).

Real disciples fight Satan, and not each other. They know that turning their back on the real enemy makes them an easy target. They know there’s no such thing as “friendly” fire. All our weapons should be trained on Satan.

*Encamped upon the hills of light, ye Christian soldiers rise!
And press the battle, ‘ere the night shall veil the glowing skies.
Against the foe, in vales below, let ALL our strength be hurled!
Faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world!*

*His banner over us is love; our sword the word of God
We tread the road the saints above, with shouts of triumph, trod.
By faith, they, like a whirlwind’s breath, swept on o’er every field.
The faith by which they conquered death is still our shining shield.*

*On every hand, the foe, we find, drawn up in dread array.
Let tents of ease be left behind, and onward! To the fray!
Salvation’s helmet on each head, with truth all girt about.
The earth shall tremble ‘neath our tread, and echo with our shout.*

*To him who overcomes the foe, white raiment shall be given.
Before the angels, he shall know his name confessed in heaven
Then onward from the hills of light, our hearts with love aflame,
We’ll vanquish all the hosts of night in Jesus’ conquering name!*

Are you in the Lord’s army? If not, do it now. If you are, brethren, remember this: we’ve got a war to win—and as long as we keep fighting, we will not lose!

SPARING YOUR ENEMY

Ben Mitchell



I grew up in Alaska. Just like every good Alaskan boy, I loved building snow forts. I remember a particular incident where friends and I were playing a game, defending our snow forts, and an older friend who was much bigger than me threw me into a snowbank and pummeled me to the point of giving me a bloody nose. I wanted revenge! I wanted so badly to take him down and return the bloody nose.

The desire to take revenge or “get back” at someone is a sinful desire that we all feel at times. Our desire for revenge may not involve physical violence. In fact, we more commonly try “sophisticated,” “grown-up” approaches in seeking our revenge. Think about times you have felt resentment toward a brother or sister in Christ and have let a passive-aggressive comment fly. Think about a time your spouse unintentionally violated an expectation of yours and, yet, you tried to “get back” at them with a stabbing comment. Our desire for revenge when we feel we have been wronged intentionally—or even unintentionally—is a natural, but sinful, response. In 1 Samuel chapters 24 and 26, David, the “man after God’s own heart,” provides an inspiring example of extending grace when he could have easily justified revenge.

1 Samuel chapters 24 and 26 pick up the ongoing saga between king Saul and his son-in-law, David. Although Saul was initially impressed by David’s military prowess, Saul’s respect for David quickly twisted into bitter jealousy. In fact, Saul offered his daughter in marriage to David—not to honor David—but to ensnare him!

So Saul said, “I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore, Saul said to David a second time, “You shall be my son-in-law today” (1 Samuel 18:21).

What a great way to establish vibrant family ties! The family affections grew fonder! Saul attempted to pin David to the wall with his spear as David played the harp for him. When Saul was unsuccessful in killing David by placing him in treacherous military situations, he tried to kill David outright in his own house. David was forced to not only flee to a foreign nation, feigning insanity, but also to hide in caves. All of this was due to the evil jealousy that consumed King Saul.

We see the story continue to unfold in 1 Samuel 24 where Saul learns that David and his men were encamped in the Wilderness of En Gedi. In 1 Samuel 24:2, “Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats.” Wow! Things had escalated! Saul took—not just any 3,000 troops—but 3,000 CHOICE men to pursue David. King Saul had fallen so deeply into his hair-brained obsession with killing his son-in-law that he was abusing significant national resources to carry it out.

The story continued when King Saul wandered into the exact cave where David and his small army were hiding. He thought he had the most secure bathroom in the En Gedi with 3,000 troops guarding the bathroom door. He was completely oblivious that there were 600 enemy troops hiding in the other bathroom stall. That’s when David’s men said, “This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you’” (1 Samuel 24:4). David’s men appeared to twist a scripture or quote from God to convince David to kill Saul. So why didn’t David kill Saul?

David could have easily justified killing Saul. David could have reasoned it was simply self-defense. Saul was there with 3,000 choice warriors to kill him! David could have reasoned that the spir-

it of God had already left Saul and that God's spirit was upon himself—which was the truth. David could have reasoned that he had already been anointed as the future king of Israel by the prophet Samuel and now was the time to take his rightful place. However, we see from David's response that he recognized these seemingly providential circumstances were not to be used as license to carry out the revenge that may have been in his heart.

“The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” So David restrained his servants with these words (1 Samuel 24:6-7).

Why was David unwilling to kill Saul? David had already killed thousands of the Lord's enemies. Why did he spare the life of his own enemy?

As the story continues, we see David secretly cut off a small piece of Saul's robe, signifying that it had been within his capacity to kill him. As Saul left, David held up the piece for Saul to see. Instead of showing defiance, David bowed before the very man who had been pursuing him and showed him honor. In verse 12, David humbly told Saul, “Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.” Even though Saul had become a God-dishonoring king, David still honored Saul because Saul had been placed in his kingly position by God. In honoring king Saul by sparing his life, David was ultimately honoring God. David left room for God's judgement and vengeance.

In verses 16-22, Saul appeared to be convicted by David's blameless actions and returned home with his troops. Finally, Saul turned over a new leaf and became the Biblical model for a father-in-law, right? Nope! In chapter 26, Saul again takes his choice 3,000 troops and resumes hunting his innocent son-in-law. Again, David found himself in a situation where he could have easily taken Saul's life and was again prompted by his men to do so. Again, David remained blameless as evident in 1 Samuel 26:9-11:

“Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?” David said furthermore, “As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed.”

What a man of character! Even when faced with the toughest tests of faithfulness, David lived out God's design to leave vengeance to Him. Romans 12 admonishes us to likewise take the peaceful path and leave vengeance to God, just as David did.

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21).

You may never end up with a bloody nose in a rambunctious snowball fight. But, when a business partner rips you off, leave it to God. When a Christian sister gossips about you, leave it to God. When someone speaks unkindly to you—even if it is your spouse or another brother or sister in Christ, just leave it to God. Certainly, there is a place for healthy communication in resolving the above issues. However, vengeance or “getting back” should never even be in the thought process of a faithful Christian. God's design for his faithful followers is to choose the peaceful path. The worldly response of taking vengeance simply escalates evil and destruction. God calls His followers to be conduits of good, breaking cycles of evil and destruction, helping to make this world a more peaceful, wholesome place. When tempted to repay evil for evil and avenge yourself, remember the example of David, and just leave it to God.

Blessings Found in Christ: The Family

Roy Knight

To be in Christ is to be in His body; to be in His body is to be in the Church; and to be in the Church is to be in the family of God. One of the greatest blessings found in Christ is that of being a part of a family of believers who have their sights set on the heavenly abode.

Being a part of the family of God entails that we be born again. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This birth is initiated in the understanding of God’s will in our lives and is brought to fruition when we are baptized into Christ. The Apostle Peter stated “...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...” (1 Peter 1:23).

Thus, on becoming a Christian, we are born again into the family of God. There we leave behind our old father, the devil (John 8:44), and are adopted into God’s family. This is perhaps the greatest blessing of the Christian family—that we are adopted by God, upon our obedience, into His great and wonderful family. We would appreciate this thought more if we would take some time and meditate upon Galatians 4:4-7:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

We can feel the ring of excitement in John’s pen

when he wrote, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1)!

Second, even though we are all different, one of the signature characteristics of the Christian family is the closeness we share, or ought to share, with one another. Paul stated in Romans 12:5, “so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Again, in Ephesians 4:25, he stated, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.” This closeness is permeated with a true Christian love for one another. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Third, Christian love motivates us to edify one another. Paul wrote, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). In Ephesians 4:11-16, he goes on to show us that Christian love produces unity that results in the edification of each member of the body of Christ. As you read down through this passage, notice how many times the words “edify,” “unity,” and “grow” are used.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,

by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

In reflecting on this passage, we must ask ourselves if we are fulfilling our part in the body of Christ or if we are growing spiritually lazy in edifying our fellow members.

Fourth, in conjunction with edification, Christians are to “sharpen” one another. Proverb 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Beyond edification, sharpening entails the idea of helping our brethren be the best they can be in the service of the Lord. One example of this is found in Acts 11:25-26. Saul had met with the Apostles in Jerusalem, and as he preached the gospel there, there was an attempt on his life (9:29). He left Jerusalem, and we next find him in his hometown of Tarsus.

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, went out of his way to fetch Saul to help him in the work at Antioch. It would seem more so for the sake of Saul

than for his own sake. It seems that the time spent with Barnabas helped launch Saul from obscurity to a place of prominence in the eyes of his fellow Christians as well as develop him into the man the Holy Spirit could use as he was sent out on his missionary journeys. Beyond edification, a blessing of the Church involves refining one’s skills for a greater and better service to the Lord.

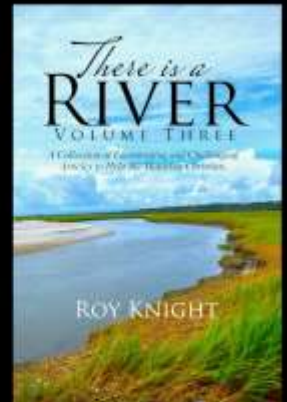
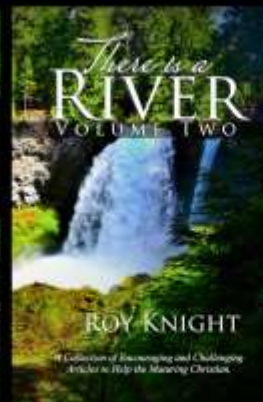
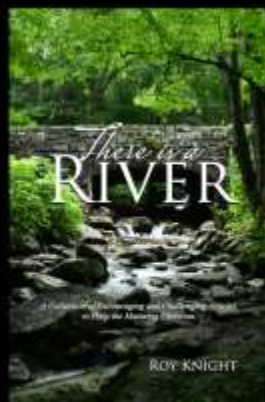
Finally, another blessing found in the Christian family is the help we receive as we face the mounting pressures of life. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Burdens come in many different forms. There are spiritual burdens as well as physical burdens that we encounter simply by living in this old “tent.” Along these lines, the writer of Hebrews encouraged his fellow Christians to...

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. (12:12-13).

The blessing of burden-bearing means I am not going it alone, but I have a faithful family that will help me when times are tough. This is, of course, only possible if we let our spiritual family know we need help in the first place. Christians are wonderful helpers, but they are bad mind-readers.

God knew what He was doing when He made the Christian family. Let us not take this wonderful blessing for granted but instead love it and encourage it as Christ would if He were here.

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The Abundant Life

Johnny O. Trail

Oftentimes, Christians are constrained to the idea of blessings that happen exclusively after one goes to Heaven. While many of our blessings are in conjunction with dwelling in Heaven eternally, there are many passages which teach that the blessings that come from being in Christ are in the here and now for the child of God.

Jesus came not only to give life, but to give it more abundantly. John 10:10b says, "...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." These words are uttered in the context of Jesus' teaching about His role as the good shepherd. Typically, a good shepherd would lead his sheep to an area where they could obtain the best nourishment possible. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is still leading His people today.

As God's people, our citizenship is in Heaven. Philippians 3:20 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." If we remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), we have a promise that is unshakeable. We live in this physical world, but we are to not be "of this world" (I Corinthians 5:10). Even so, we have blessings in both abodes—the Heavenly and the physical world.

Christians have the abundant life because we are blessed in a material fashion.

God provides His people with what they need. While we are encouraged to seek after spiritual

things first, God promises to provide the things we need for continued survival. Matthew 6:31-33 says,

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Christians have the abundant life because we have access to the Creator of the Universe.

Typically, we are not granted access to presidents, rulers, governors, or other important leaders. However, we have access to One greater than all human beings—Jehovah God. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The Father allows those in Christ to come "boldly" before His throne with our supplications.

Christians have the abundant life because we have spiritual blessings in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." These spiritual blessings far outweigh any material blessings we are afforded with in this life. For one thing, we have a peace in our lives that people in the world cannot begin to fathom (Philip-

prians 4:6-7).

Christians have the abundant life, because we have a High priest who intercedes on our behalf.

Hebrews 2:17-18 says:

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

While we are not to continue in sin (Romans 6.1ff), our Savior's blood continually cleanses us from iniquity if we acknowledge our sins, repent, and ask for forgiveness (I John 1:7-10).

Christians have the abundant life, because we have High Priest who is acquainted with the human condition and the nature of temptation.

Hebrews 4:14 says:

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Christ, our example of overcoming sin (Revelation 3.21), has demonstrated how we can resist and overcome temptation (Matthew 4:1-11).

Christians have the abundant life because Jesus has promised to help us with our burdens.

There is no promise of health and wealth in this life, but God has promised to help us with our problems to the extent that He bears them with us. Matthew 11:28-30 says:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Christians have the abundant life because we are not in bondage to sin and its power.

Romans 6:17-18 says:

But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

The bondage of sin is especially apparent in situations where people are addicted to various things. While this is the case, we sometime overlook things that are habitual sins. These sins may not be as serious in human terms of judgment, but they all separate one from God (Isaiah 59:2).

Christians have the abundant life since sin and death have no power over God's people.

The word of God provides hope even in the most horrible times. When we struggle with the death of a loved one or our own impending death, we have the promise of victory in a situation that is the epitome of defeat for those in the world. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 says:

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." O death, which is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The prayers of all the saints should include a desire for those outside of Christ to have access to the "abundant life" that is found for those in Christ. One is placed into Christ at the point of baptism. Romans 6:3-4 says:

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

THE ACT OF MARRIAGE

Mike Mazzalongo

Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24-25

On December 13, 2022, Bill H.R. 8404 – “The Respect for Marriage Act” – became the Law of the United States. It replaces provisions in federal law that defined marriage as a union specifically between a man and a woman, and a spouse as a person of the opposite sex. It changed this definition of marriage with the provision, “...that recognizes any marriage between two individuals that is valid under State law.” This law trumps all State laws on the matter which means that States cannot enact laws that bar same-sex marriages and States that have such laws are now invalid, confirming a 2015 ruling by the Supreme Court (*Obergefell vs. Hodges*). There is a provision that allows the Department of Justice to bring civil action against those who violate (disagree, interfere, fight against) this law. For example, Gay groups could bring legal action against those who do not cooperate with this legislation. There is also protection for religious groups’ rights under conscience of religion which includes the right not to participate, recognize, or celebrate such marriages.

This article will articulate why, as a Bible believing Christian teacher and preacher, I refuse to recognize, participate, or celebrate such marriages. In other words, the law that gives Gay people the right to have legal same-sex marriages in all fifty states – that same law gives ministers the right to refuse to accept or perform these types of marriages and by extension, also explain why they refuse to do so if they so choose.

To this end, it would be helpful if we examined what happens when the Act of Marriage takes place.

THE ACT OF MARRIAGE

between a man and a woman

Biblical marriage is a symbol of the highest commitment of love that can be expressed: monogamy for life expressed in law.

Some say, “I don’t need a piece of paper to be married or to express my love and commitment.” Usually said by those who simply choose to live together or as they say, cohabitate.

However, without a marriage license you are just living together (like married people) except you are not married – because married people are er... married!

Living together, having babies together, even cohabitating for a lifetime is a VERSION of marriage but it is not the original, not the real thing. Cohabitation has been “normalized” in our secular society because our moral levels have been in decline in this area for several decades.

In 1970, ½ of 1% lived together without marriage.

Today, 15% of the 18-34 yr. bracket do so.

This percentage is growing (Currents - 2018)

I understand there may be arguments for this choice to simply “live together” instead of marrying, things like lack of money, inconvenience, family pressure, uncertainty, lack of commitment, etc. – but I am only addressing the larger issue of marriage vs. cohabitation as acceptable choices for people of faith.

My first point here is not to confuse “normalization” with “legitimization,” which is the sanctioning of some situation or status through law. Cohabitation has been normalized in the U.S., even given a form of legitimacy, to protect children and guard against abuse, and also regulate the division of assets in the case of a break-up. However, even with these legal provisions, cohabitation is not marriage

and not even referred to as marriage by the couple living together! They refer to each other as partner, lover, boyfriend/girlfriend, or fiancé, but never as husband or wife because they know this is not true. The union of a man and a woman confirmed and recognized by law or social convention has been the will of God and the standard throughout history both biblical and secular.

In an article about the history of marriage in *The Week*, a digital news publication, researchers found evidence that marriage laws, rights, and practices date back at least 4350 years. The Bible teaches that marriage was practiced during the time of Adam and Eve – 6,000 years ago – Genesis 2:25. That this norm (one man + one woman for life – Gen. 2:18-25) is breaking down is not a symbol of progress as some purveyors of the newest ideas spread through digital media, government, and education would have you believe, but rather a common symptom of a society in decline seen in every fallen empire or society of the past.

This pattern was confirmed by a social anthropologist from Oxford, Dr. J.D. Unwin, in his research on 86 different societies, in his book entitled, “Sex and Culture.” This was a massive project only “summarized” in his 600-page book! His basic conclusion, however, was that societies flourished socially and economically when they followed the traditional approach to sex and marriage. This was true in every case (i.e., sex practiced only within marriage, marriage between a man and a woman, monogamous and a lifetime commitment)! Experiments with different models like polygamy, open marriage, sex without marriage, or same-sex activity normalized, all led to the eventual demise of that society within three generations of the break with traditional values. We, in the U.S., are one generation into the break with traditional values.

The Act of Marriage between a man and a woman creates the union that most resembles the nature of God.

There are several reasons why this is so:

Both God and a married couple have a dynamic

nature. (1) God is a triune deity: Father/Son/Holy Spirit. (2) A married couple are two that become one through a lifetime of sexual monogamous intimacy blessed by God.

Those in mere cohabitation, even if monogamous, do not have God’s blessing because they are in disobedience for refusing to formalize their unions legally. It is as if I just flew in from Canada and decided to stay in the U.S. (but took no citizenship or legalized my stay). I root for O.U., celebrate the 4th of July, buy a house and a truck, fly a flag outside my house, visit Washington and do what Americans do. Am I a citizen even if I have lived here for 25 years? NO. Why? I did not formalize my stay legally.

When you do not formalize your union legally, even if you have been together 20 years and have children, it is still NOT marriage.

And same-sex marriages, are they spiritually dynamic? No, why? Because one man and another man make two, not one like a male and female do.

Another way that marrieds resemble God is that they both have creative ability. (1) God creates the world (what is seen) from what is unseen – Hebrews 11:3. (2) Married couples procreate humanity – Genesis 1:28.

Cohabitants are in disobedience. Same sex couples cannot procreate.

Both are the epitome of the highest spiritual quality, HOLINESS. Holiness is defined as a state which is transcendent, immeasurable, pure, and separate. (1) God is holy by nature – He is divine. (2) Marrieds cultivate holiness through various practices which please God:

- a. Intimacy blessed by God - holy sex.
- b. Lifetime fidelity.
- c. Self-sacrifice for spouse.
- d. Accepting and fulfilling one’s role within marriage.

For cohabitating couples,

- a. Intimacy is sinful,
- b. Fidelity has no cost (no legal commitment – no cost),
- c. Self-sacrifice is to please partner, not God.

- d. Roles are without context if you are not married.

For same-sex couples,

- a. Intimacy – sinful (Leviticus 18:22)
- b. Fidelity and self-sacrifice to please partner.
- c. Roles are illegitimate (Genesis 2:18-25) – Men cannot be wives and women cannot be husbands.

The Defense of Marriage Act legalizes a same-sex union at a higher level of man-made law which nevertheless remains illegitimate according to God's given Law:

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination (Leviticus 18:22).

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 (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

What to do?

Most of us are familiar with the information I have given you so far, but what are we supposed to do with it? Here are some suggestions especially for Christians:

Understand a reality that you, as a believer, may not like or want to admit about cohabitants or same-sex unions. For example:

Co-Habs may simply not want to marry.

There may be any number of reasons:

- They are already married to someone else and cannot afford a divorce.
- No money for a wedding.
- Do not see the need (Don't rock the boat).
- Do not care what others think.
- Have no religious convictions.

The only way to make them want to marry is when they want to please God – and this is less about marriage and more about the gospel.

Things we need to understand about...

Same-Sex Unions.

- Their love is sincere.
- Their sex satisfies them.
- They want what marriage offers: stability, emotional balance, home, family and a sense of belonging.
- What they do not have is legitimacy with God, despite the things they strive for in their union.

I could say the same for a heterosexual man who falls in love with his friend's wife and she with him:

- They desire each other; it is as if they were meant to be together.
- The sex is satisfying.
- They want to be together, start a new life; they finally feel at home and this is so right that it cannot be wrong!
- Only one thing missing here: legitimacy with God. What they call lovemaking, He calls fornication; what they feel is so right, He calls adultery (Exodus 20:14).

Without God's approval from the Bible (not some ultra-liberal denomination), no union can succeed on a spiritual level. If it is not legitimate in God's eyes, it is just not legitimate—no matter how many laws human beings pass. In the end God will judge, not man.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Another reality about same-sex unions:

What they cannot have is by design. They cannot change or obtain what is naturally built into a marriage between a woman and a man.

1. They cannot have a dynamic unity where two become one physically, emotionally and spiritually.
2. Without procreative ability, a world with only same-sex unions would become extinct.
3. There is no holiness possible because, as

we have read, God forbids homosexual practice and without holiness we can never

- i. Become like God
- ii. Have unity with God at His right hand.
- iii. Be crowned with eternal life.

Both heterosexuals and those with same-sex attraction issues are instructed to be chaste before marriage and this is quite a challenge regardless of your orientation. However, God gives us only one option that leads to holiness, satisfaction, and eternal blessings and that is a monogamous lifetime marriage to an opposite sex marriage partner where both spouses are faithful to Jesus Christ to the end.

I am not talking about what is easy or what seems natural. For homosexuals, sexual purity is a step of faith and trust in Christ. For some heterosexuals the thought of having only one partner for life is just as daunting and requires the same step of faith and trust in Christ.

... so, what to do #1 – understand reality from God’s perspective.

And what to do #2... Take Romans 6:23a seriously!

“For the wages of sin is death, “

You see, if Eve could have seen the damage done by her disobedience, maybe things would have been different. Sometimes both young and old, or male and female, or Gay and straight do not fully realize that Romans 6:23a is LITERAL! Experimenting with drugs, alcohol, various types of sex or other forms of sin like witchcraft, lying, stealing, violence or deceptive business practices – all these types of sin and more, can change you or ruin you for life!

The lonely college student who tries Gay sex just to see what that is like. The bored housewife who decides to have a fling with her neighbor’s college age son. These people bring down more destruction and unwanted change than they bargained for. Why? Because the wages of sin is death, and a spiritual death spiral from which most cannot break free.

My late uncle, Paul, was one of these. Artistically talented in commercial design (he created the win-

dow displays for department stores). Married my mom’s youngest sister, the lovely Madeleine, had two great kids – one problem, he was a lifelong alcoholic.

He once told me that he had his first drink at 15, a glass of wine at a wedding, what could be the harm? Well, no harm for the others but he said the light “buzz” he felt from the wine turned on a “switch of desire for alcohol” inside of him that never left him after that.

Many years later when he was in his fifties, I went to see him in the hospital where he was in hospice care, dying of bone cancer. You could see the ravages of his alcohol abuse in his face and eyes.

I was a new Christian back then, not quite sure of what to say so I asked him, “If I prayed for God to heal you today, what is the first thing you would do?”

He answered that if healed that day, he would leave the hospital in search of a drink!

I did not realize it then, but God was showing me a person hopelessly imprisoned by sin, awaiting its consequence which was death, both physical and spiritual.

God is serious about sin and its power. He has given us evidence of its destructive power in the history of the Jewish nation, plagued by war and other calamities and reduced to a tiny remnant by the time of Jesus’ appearance. And who reading this does not have an Uncle Paul or a sister or other family member past or present who underestimated sin’s deadly sting, and like an animal caught in a hunter’s deadly trap, spent a lifetime either trying to free themselves or simply accepted their fallen state as normal?

God never lies, never! If He says that sin leads to death in all of its manifestations while we are alive and then separation from Him in the world to come – then this is the way things will go – any opinion to the contrary, any brave denials or smug dismissals of this truth by famous people or supposed intellectuals are lies from hell to divert you there in the future.

To summarize concerning what we need to do in

a world where men marry men and women claim to be men or vice versa.

1. Accept the reality that this represents a decline in our society and will lead to ruin for us in the not-too-distant future just like other nations who permitted this degradation of moral standard in their societies.

2. Believe God when He says that personal sin leads to personal, physical, and long-term spiritual death. Romans 6:23a – “For the wages of sin is death, “

And finally on a note of hope...

3. Cling to the Cross of Christ for salvation and the preservation of that salvation.

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1:4).

In creating mankind with the privilege of free will, God knew ahead of time that despite the warning, man would choose to disobey and fall victim to sin's consequence: death. But there is a second part of that verse which is equally true:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

Our task as Christians in a world that continually finds ways of disobeying God and calling down His judgement upon itself, is to faithfully preach the gospel to it, since, as Paul says:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Therefore, our first task is to invite, call, and encourage sinners to come to the cross for salvation. Whether the world is up or way down, this is always the task of the Church, to raise up the cross of Christ to a dying world. Secondly, we as Christians need to cling to Jesus and His cross in order to find our way to the holiness of God, intimacy with God, productivity for God and wholeness before God. While others seek gratification of their flesh by sowing to the flesh in this world, which will ultimately perish as all flesh does, Christians sow to the Spirit which leads to glory and exaltation to the right hand of God with Jesus – an eternity of existence grafted into the Godhead made possible through Christ.

And all of this promised to those who come to the cross for forgiveness, proclaim the power of the cross for salvation and cling to the cross faithfully for life. Those who do will be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and then when Jesus returns, will be transferred into the eternal kingdom in heaven with all those who waited faithfully and loved the coming of His appearance.

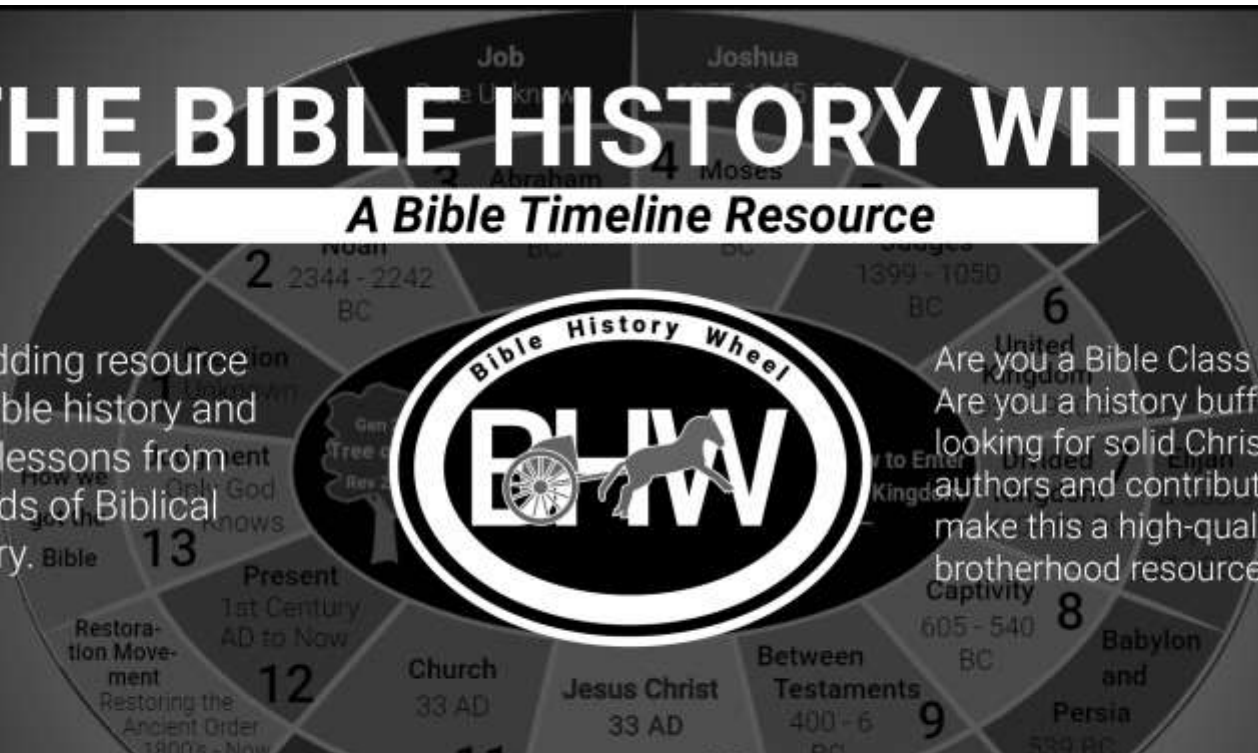
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HOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS Relate to *TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* CHRISTIANS THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY THOU SHALT NOT STEAL

Charles R. Rose

Commandment #7: You Shall Not Commit Adultery

Commandment # 7 is one of the most common sins within our society, and even within the Lord's church, yet, it is one of the least preached on from many pulpits today.

The Hebrew word for adultery used in this commandment, according to Adam Clarke, p-406, is derived from the words "AD ALTERIUS TORUM" meaning "to another's bed."

In the New Testament we find the Greek word "MOICHOS" translated adultery, which, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p-32-33, "denotes one who has unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another." Our Lord Jesus Christ quotes this commandment in Matthew 5:27, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery." It's not difficult for one to see when those of old were told not to commit adultery. It is number seven of the Ten Commandments. We also know that the husband/wife relationship was designed by the God who created us. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18 NKJV), The King James Version and American Standard of 1901 render this, "an help meet for him," while the New

American Standard Bible has "A helper suitable for him. We then read from Genesis 2:21-24:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

This was God's original design for the husband/wife relationship. This was God's design when he came down on Mount Sinai and gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. It is God's design today. Thus we understand Jesus' comment in Matthew 5:27. But Jesus went further than the seventh commandment when he quoted it. Notice Matthew 5:28:

But I say to you that whosoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

With this thought of committing adultery with a woman in one's heart because of his lusting after her, turn back to Exodus 20:17 and compare a portion of the tenth commandment with what Jesus said. The tenth commandment concerns covetous-

ness, and a portion of the commandment says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” We usually think of covetousness as wanting more and more money or things which money can buy, and to covet these things is sinful in that it takes one’s affections away from God and places them on worldly possessions (we will see this in more detail when we cover commandment number ten). But for our present thought notice that Jesus uses this thought of coveting your neighbor’s wife in connection with adultery. To covet your neighbor’s wife is to lust after her.

As I said at the beginning of this lesson, we see this commandment broken so often today. And it isn’t always by non-believers, but all too often by members of the Lord’s body. Also notice that Christ’s words are not just for those who would covet their neighbor’s wife; ladies, “You shall not covet [lust after] your neighbor’s husband” either. The tenth commandment also condemns coveting the man servant and maid servant. Who would have the audacity to suggest that this does not cover every male and female, married or single, which would lust for one another in their hearts?

It is not at all unusual today to hear of men and women of the church having affairs with another member’s husband or wife. I have heard of numerous accounts of such, and read of many more. Shortly before these lessons were first put together, a preacher in the Lord’s church was discovered to have had affairs with more than one woman in the congregation where he preached. Why? Lust! And notice the thought of *more than* one woman. Again, this command is as much for the women as for the men. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s husband.” Somewhere in all of those reports the women with whom he had those affairs lost control and began to lust as well. Women lusting to go to bed with men other than their own husband didn’t end with Potiphar’s wife. (Genesis 39:7-12).

When my family moved to work with one congregation in the mid-west, I asked the brethren for names of prospects whom I could visit. Three of the brothers of the congregation told me of one young

woman who had stopped attending services, and all three warned me not to go to her alone, and they all used basically the same words: “She will flaunt herself at any man who goes alone.” I never went to her house alone. And I have often wondered within myself if this could be one reason the Lord always sent the disciples out “two-by-two” (Luke 10:1; Matthew 21:1). I have made it my policy never to visit in the homes of our ladies alone unless it is absolutely necessary. I take my wife or one of the other men when I visit. Often times one of our ladies will drop by the church building to work on projects or clean and I am always ill-at-ease when that happens. And I usually will leave until they finish.

We have known of others over the years having an affair, and sometimes divorcing their wife or husband of many years because of their lust for the spouse of another. In any given community, preachers of all religions are held to a higher standard, are they not? We knew a couple (members of one of the local denominations in the town where I preached) who were having marriage problems, and the wife went to their preacher for counseling. The next thing we knew she had divorced her husband and married that preacher. Why? Lust! That preacher began to “covet his neighbor’s wife.” I could tell the same type of true accounts of elders and elders’ wives who were caught up in the heat of the moment.

Women who “flirt with” and “proposition” men, are just as guilty as is the man who “looks on a woman to lust after her.” Both are guilty of adultery in their hearts, and “You shall not commit adultery” and remain in God’s grace. It is a sin that, if not repented of, and turned away from, will condemn one’s soul to “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Brethren, I have heard so many stories along these lines, which have turned out to be true, that I would not be shocked to hear of such happening even in my home congregation. Disappointed? YES! Heartbroken? ABSOLUTELY! Shocked? NO! I think I’m beyond that.

Yes, commandment number seven is very much a part of the law of Christ today! And Jesus says that

if you just allow your mind to dwell on one of the opposite sex in a lustful manner you are as guilty as if you committed the physical act.

Rest assured, if you are guilty of breaking this, or any of God's commandments, it is not done in secret. And especially not sins such as we have been talking about in this lesson. There always seems to be someone who finds out your secret sins and is ready to spread it like a wildfire throughout the congregation and the community. And even if you should be able to keep your lustfulness and covetousness from your fellow Christians, still "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give Account" (Hebrews 4:13b). And you will give account!

Look deep into your own soul today. Are you guilty of the sin of lust? You can "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" as we are told to do in 2 Corinthians 10:5. "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." You can train your mind to think good, clean thoughts.

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy, THINK ON THESE THINGS" (Philippians 4:8).

If you are guilty of such sin, "repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thoughts of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22 KJV).

Commandment #8: You Shall Not Steal

The Exodus account of the eighth commandment says simply, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

Nobody likes a thief! Even their accomplices in crime know they cannot be trusted with anything of value. There was a time when we knew about everyone in our small town setting. We knew the inclina-

tions of about everyone around us. We knew whom we could trust and the ones to avoid. If something was missing, we probably had a pretty good idea as to who may have taken it.

As an example, allow me to relate true story: When I was a young man in the hills of Arkansas, most of my crowd didn't have very reliable automobiles, and breakdowns were fairly common. I recall an incident back in those days where my best friend Bennie had this old 1954 Ford break down and he left it beside the road. When he returned a thief had stolen a tire and wheel off of his car. However, this thief used an old bumper jack that had a broken part, which prevented it from being "jacked-back-down," so he had left it under the car. As I said a moment ago, you usually had some idea as to the identity of the culprit, and this was the case. My friend recognized that jack. What would you have done had you recognized something that identified the thief who had taken your property? My friend didn't go directly to the man responsible and threaten him as many would do. He didn't tell him he would have him arrested or anything such as that. Instead, he simply went to the place where most of us "hung out" and got into a place where he knew the suspected thief would overhear him speaking and told someone else that he was pretty sure he knew who the culprit was (without calling his name). But he said if when he returned to his car the next day the tire and wheel were back, he would just figure someone had borrowed it and that would be it. But if it was still missing, then he would resort to more drastic measures. Sure enough, when he returned to his car the next day the wheel had been replaced, but that old broken jack still could not be lowered and the thief had left it under the car. I have wondered many times if Bennie still had that old jack.

Again, the point of this story is that we used to know about everyone around us, and their inclinations. Today things are much different. Even in our small towns we hardly know the person just up the road or across the street. With new people from far off places moving in and out of our communities,

almost daily, one cannot keep up with all the changes and personalities. It is sad, but, because of this we sometimes build up distrust towards any stranger we meet.

Most people who will steal from you will also lie to you! In Leviticus 19:11-12 stealing is coupled closely with untruths in business dealings and communications with others. Furthermore, God says this sin is one way in which one may profane His Divine name. Listen to Him in Leviticus 19:11:

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

We can easily see and understand the Old Testament Law against stealing. This sin would include petty larceny, armed robberies, private stealing, vandalism, even the taking advantage of the buyer's or the seller's ignorance (to give one less and make the other pay more for a commodity than it is actually worth).

Let us now turn to the New Testament and the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus points out that thieves break in and steal that which another has worked hard to accumulate for themselves:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

In contrasting our earthly treasures to treasures which are "laid up in heaven," He gives a picture of the mindset of both Christian and thief. While the true child of God has his heart set on "things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2), the thief has his mind set on taking that which belongs to another, and often by force if necessary.

How often do we listen to the local news or read the local papers without hearing of some kind of robbery taking place? And how often does the thief

trying to take another's property do so by violent means, even murder? Is that not what Jesus said about the thief in John 10:10? "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." In the context of John 10, our Lord is comparing the false teacher who steals souls away from God to the thief who breaks in and steals your earthly valuables. Thus, we see that thievery may be physical or spiritual. Under the Old Testament Law of the Ten Commandments God said the false prophets were thieves who stole His word from the people (Jeremiah 23:30). What of those today who would "teach for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9)? In Acts 13:8-10 we read of a man named Elymas:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him, and said, O full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?

Elymas was then struck blind because of his sinfulness.

Did you notice the word "fraud" in verse ten? This is the rendering in both the King James and New King James. The actual Greek word used there is "RHA-DI-OUR-GIA" and the true translation would be "Villainy" as found in the ASV and RSV. Of the Greek word, *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 187-188 says: "villainy, mischief. In the papyri it is used of theft." The KJV and NKJV translate this as "fraud." A fraud is one who through subtlety and fraudulent means takes that which belongs to another. In other words, they steal it. And this is true to the original meaning in the papyri.

Is robbery stealing? Of course it is. Remember I said a moment ago that thievery may be either physical or spiritual? Under the Old Testament Law of Moses the Ten Commandments were expanded to include hundreds of commands. In regards to their commandment to tithe, God said His people robbed

him by failing to give as they should in their contributions (Malachi 3:8). “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings.” Here the thievery is both physical and spiritual. Is that a problem in the twenty-first-century church?

I realize that we are not commanded to give a specified percentage of our income in our offering. However, a very casual reading of 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 will tell one that he is to give in proportion to that which he has received. As you read the Corinthian passage, please note that this is an order, not a mere suggestion.

As I have given ORDERS to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper.

2 Corinthians 9:7 instructs the Christian to “purpose in his heart” the amount he will give.

I am afraid many have used this as a “scapegoat” to give less and hold back a portion of that which rightfully belongs to God. They have the idea that since I get to decide for myself the amount I give, God must be pleased with it no matter how much or how little I choose.

Just think of how our God blesses us with our abilities to earn a living. And remember that we have a Savior who “is also Mediator of a better covenant; which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). Brethren, if the covenant and promises under which you and I live and serve God through Jesus Christ are “better” than the promises and covenant given to the Jews, why should one think God will be pleased with our giving less than He required of them?

Does that sound negative? I have had people tell me that they believed that if we just kept the Ten Commandments we would be saved. One went as far as accusing us of being too negative in our teaching and said, “I believe all a person has to do is keep the Ten Commandments!” I hate to sound negative, but we are looking at the Ten Commandments

[Stealing] includes petty larceny, armed robberies, private stealing, vandalism, even the taking advantage of the buyer’s or the seller’s ignorance (to give one less and make the other pay more for a commodity than it is actually worth).

and how they relate to Christians of the twenty-first century. Look at all ten closely. Nine out of the ten begins with “Thou shall not.” The only way to get any more negative would be to begin all ten the same way. Only the fourth com-

mandment begins with the thought of something you CAN do, and then as one studies the complete law of the Sabbath it also turns very negative very quickly. The people were not allowed to do any manual work on that day. You ladies couldn’t cook a meal for your family on the Sabbath, it had to be prepared on the sixth day. You could only travel a very short distance from your house on the Sabbath. The fact is you cannot study the Ten Commandments without thinking negatively. It is a completely negative law.

At this particular point we are looking at that commandment which says, “You shall not steal,” and we are thinking particularly about robbing or stealing from God. Do you look at the record board at your congregation from week to week? I once read an article that said:

Sometimes people will be away and the contribution will drop. In some congregations I have seen it drop to well below what is needed to meet the budget. And if the budget isn’t met the Lord’s work isn’t done. When those people return we see the contribution back up. Often times though, it only returns to the normal

range. When a Christian is away from his home congregation, then the contribution should show his love for God when he returns by being slightly more than normal as it reflects our giving to God for the time we were away.

To those who refuse to return a portion of that with which God has blessed them, or to those who miss Sunday services or leave for vacation or holidays and do not contribute on those Sundays, God's indictment of Malachi 3:8 fits perfectly: "Will you rob God?" Now, do we really need to ask, "Wherein have I robbed God?" Is there a scripture anywhere in the Bible, Old or New Testament, which says, "When I am not here I am not required to give as God has prospered me that week?" Look at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

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. 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."

Some of the Christians to whom Paul was writing "were" (that is they had been) "thieves and extortioners." But they had been "washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Paul asked a very pointed question to me, and all gospel preachers, in Romans 2:21: "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?" And to the Christians at Ephesus he admonished, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." Then in Romans 13:7-10 Paul tells us how we may fulfill the law of God.

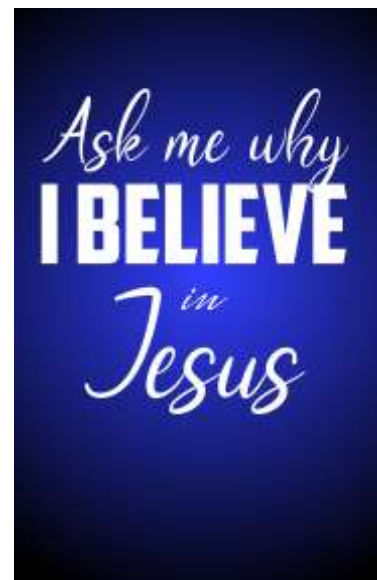
Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom cus-

toms, fear to whom fear, honor to whom, honor. Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law, for the commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, you shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

Forgiveness for the thief is the same as for any other sinner: If the thief will BELIEVE Christ to be the Son of the living God (John 8:24; Acts 8:28), will REPENT, turning away from his dishonest ways (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), CONFESS faith in Jesus as the Christ and Savior (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10), and will submit to immersion in BAPTISM (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4); The blood of Christ will cleanse this and all sins (1 John 1:7).

Do you have unforgiven sins in your life? Do you need to have them washed away in baptism? Or, perhaps you are a Christian who has backslidden and gone back into the world. In that case you need to do as Simon the sorcerer did, repent and return asking God to forgive you.

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WHAT IT TAKES TO BE SAVED

Chuck Wuchter

Today we are going to be talking about Gods employee handbook. It is important for Christians to review this handbook every once in a while to assure we stay on track. Just like when you work for a company, they have a handbook explaining the rules and regulations. What I am referring to as God employee handbook is the plan of salvation that all Christians must follow.

That is to Believe, Repent, Confess, be Baptized and Live Godly.

When I was a baby, my parents had me christened and I was sprinkled. Grew up, went to Sunday school all the time—this was all taking place at the United Church of Christ. When I was a teenager, I went through confirmation class and I thought I was doing everything right.

When I moved to Oklahoma, I started attending the McLoud Church of Christ. After my wife Bonnie had been baptized, and we were attending regularly and listening to the lessons from the preacher (Wayne Price), I started to do some research and studying on my own. It was then I then realized I was not okay with God. So , in 2007 I was Baptized into Christ.

Jesus taught, and the apostles (guided by the Holy Spirt) also taught that in order to be saved, it is necessary that one ...

Believe

John 20:30-31

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he who cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Acts 16:31

And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Repent

Luke: 13:3-5

I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish

Acts 17:30-31

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead.

Confess

Mathew 10:32

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

Acts 8:37

And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.

Romans 10:9-10

That if Thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Be Baptized

Mark 16:15-16

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be Baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:26-27

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Romans 6:3-4

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life.

1 Peter 3:20-21

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight soul were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Live Godly

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ: who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

2 Peter 1:5-11

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is the plan of Salvation, the guide every person should follow, and that every Christian has followed (through baptism) and should continue to follow (living Godly).

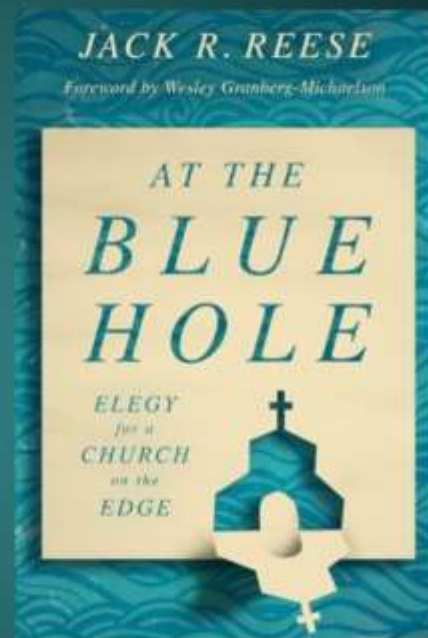
Where are you, in relation to this wonderful saving plan of God?

ANALYZING THE WATER

"At the Blue Hole"

a Review Primarily
of chapter 1 of
Jack R. Reese's book
"AT THE BLUE HOLE"

Jim Mitchell



When reviewing any piece of literature there is a need to be as thorough as possible. In higher education especially, students are encouraged to analyze writings of the authors to whom they have been introduced. Such an approach to the written (or spoken) word should be the norm, not the exception. In fact, Reese himself mentions "*critical thinking*" in a positive way (p. 14), so it should be safe to assume that he would welcome that approach to his book. Engage, dissect, even debate the preconceptions, assumptions, and conclusions in any material being reviewed. Indeed, just as those in Berea "*searched the Scriptures daily*" to see if Paul and Silas were stating the truth (Acts 17:10-12), we need to do the same. Truth has nothing to fear from such analysis, in fact it should be welcomed. In reviewing this book, such an approach will be our goal. If statements and positions taken by Jack Reese hold true, then that should be noted. If his statements and positions are flawed, that needs to be noted just as strongly (if not more

so).¹

¹ At the outset of our look into "AT The BLUE HOLE" something needs to be addressed concerning defeasible reasoning and informal fallacies. "Reasoning is defeasible when the corresponding argument is rationally compelling but not deductively valid. The truth of the premises of a good defeasible argument provide support for the conclusion, even though it is possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false. In other words, the relationship of support between premises and conclusion is a tentative one, potentially defeated by additional information." [*Defeasible Reasoning (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)* [First published Fri Jan 21, 2005; substantive revision Fri Jun 25, 2021] accessed on 3/31/2023]. While described in a variety of ways, if information is omitted which, if included, would invalidate the desired conclusion, one can be left with an erroneous conclusion. The following analysis will build the case that Reese's book is problematic in that regard. It will be shown that he in fact does omit pertinent evidence from history which invalidates a primary conclusion he reaches. The informal fallacy referred to as: Ignoring the Counter Evidence. This is another way to describe the way Reese arrives at his conclusion concerning the Stone-Campbell meeting. [see—T. Edward Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments* 3rd Ed.(Wadsworth, 1995), p. 147-149.]

The title of Jack R. Reese's book comes from the "blue hole" spring just north of downtown San Antonio that provides water for the city and beyond (pp. 1-3). Reese uses this as a catalyst for his discussion of what spiritually supplies the "Blue Hole" for Churches of Christ (p. 4). Interestingly enough, from Reese's perspective, this spiritual "Blue Hole" does not appear to be Scripture, but rather something which happened in 1831 in Lexington, Kentucky. This is the way it is described in reference to Churches of Christ on page 5 of his book.

"What happened at the old cotton mill is part of the identity of these churches. Or should be, because if they don't know where their source spring is, it will be hard to understand where they came from, how the currents flow, how they might navigate the white water ahead, or where the river might lead. Because the currents are tricky. The rapids are treacherous. And the future is not guaranteed.

"Said plainly, churches are in trouble. All churches are, but certainly Churches of Christ, for reasons we will soon see. Whether or not they recognize the threats they are facing is a different matter. The future is fraught with dangers. Many won't make it.

"Our task is to find the resources that can help us along the way. Turns out, most of what we require is already in our possession. We just need a clear sense of what they are and why they are so important. That will be our quest.

"...I will point out key landmarks along the way. We will notice where the river zags, how the land slopes, the ways the cliffs alter the course of the riverbed. We will need to consult our compass from time to time to remind ourselves which way is north." (p. 5)

Brief as they may be, the above quotes are a vital aspect of the essence of one of the objectives of Reese's book. He states later – *"My purpose is not merely to tell some stories from the past but to examine these churches' beliefs and practices, their patterns and meanings."* (p. 13) How well does Reese do with such an examination?

"To be honest, Churches of Christ are not an easy group to write about. We are diverse, complicated, and messy. In fact, we have exhibited far more variety over the years than the story we tell about ourselves usually admits. That variety is almost always interesting but not always pretty." (p. 13)

"[My] desire is to serve as a bridge – between past and present, between scholarship and the daily life of the church, between those who have remained in Churches of Christ and those who have not, between Churches of Christ and other communities of faith." (pp. 12, 13)

"We will begin our story in Lexington, Kentucky, with a handshake and a song, at an old cotton mill newly consecrated as a church house on a cold New Year's Eve. ... The place is **Lexington** in **1831**, at the church house on New Year's Eve, when a handshake cracked open the earth. Here is the 'Blue Hole.' **Here is where Churches of Christ began.** At least Churches of Christ as we know them today, by that particular name and history and disposition." (p. 4) [emphasis mine, JM]

"It might be difficult for a people who have often been told that history is irrelevant to acknowledge an **origin story** more recent than the Pentecost of Acts 2. But claimed or unclaimed, the events of Lexington, the story of these people, still shapes them directly and profoundly." (p. 5) [emphasis mine, JM]

The selectivity of this one event being an "*origin story*" while overlooking similar religious movements across the still young United States of America raises the question of credibility. Taking "*The Blue Hole*" at face value, without any further study, one might tend to believe Reese when he says "*here*" (Lexington, Kentucky 1831) "*is where Churches of Christ began,*" yet Reese contradicts himself on page 97 by stating that Stone and Campbell first met in 1824 and that by that time "*Stone's churches had long used the name Christian Church and Church of Christ.*" Since therefore, by his own admission, the "Church of Christ" had been in existence well before 1824, why would

Reese believe the “origin” was **1831**? On page 4 Reese attempts to soften the contradiction by stating it is this group in 1831 that is closest to who and what the Church of Christ is today. Reese fails to offer any evidence or even an explanation why he believes this to be the case but, as we will note, assumptive over-reach is prominent in the way Reese writes. Other historical information could have been included, but they would have only served to either tremendously weaken Reese’s premise or destroy it altogether. For example, note a statement found in *“THE LIFE, CONVERSION, PREACHING, TRAVELS AND SUFFERINGS of ELIAS SMITH”* published in 1816 by Beck & Foster (Portsmouth, N.H.)

“When our number was some short of twenty, we agreed to consider ourselves a church of Christ, owning Him as our only Master, Lord and Lawgiver, and we agreed to consider ourselves Christians without the addition of any unscriptural name.” (pp. 313, 314)

Consider what took place during the life of Abner Jones even earlier than 1816.

“In 1801, with about a dozen of his neighbors he founded a church in Lyndon, with no creed but the Bible and no denominational affiliation. The group called themselves simply “Christians. “ The movement thus begun in New England had its counterparts in other sections of the country, where the followers of James O’Kelley, Barton W. Stone, and Alexander Campbell successively abandoned creeds and ecclesiastical centralization and reverted to ‘primitive Christianity.’”²

The above comment suggests that “the movement” had its beginning in New England, not Kentucky. Which is correct: 1801, 1816, 1831 or some other date? Consider what happened to John Mulkey on November 11, 1809 when he was on trial before the Stockton Valley Baptist Association con-

cerning Mulkey’s move away from Calvinism.

“John Mulkey proposed to “drop all disputes and bear with one another,” but they replied, ‘Never, till you come back to the very ground from which you started.’ He then proposed a dissolution of the church, to which all agreed; and as many as wished to continue on, their old platform, enrolled their names as ‘The Church.’” (Recollections of Men of Faith, Isaac T. Reneau, p.226)

The quote suggests that while it was Mulkey who wanted to “*bear with one another*,” it was the denomination with which he had been affiliated that refused to “*drop all disputes*,” not Mulkey.

Since these and other dates are of people determined to follow the Bible, throwing off man-made documents prior to the year Reese contends the church of Christ began “*as we know it*” (1831), the burden of proof rests upon Reese to show how and why those early congregations were NOT “Churches of Christ.” Unfortunately, his book fails to do so. Certainly it would not be acceptable for students, tasked with analyzing history, to skew their view in such a way as to eliminate historical items from consideration to the point of declaring one event as “*the beginning*” without mentioning preceding events which endeavored to do the same and pointing out why they were not the same. What would be unacceptable for any student would be especially unacceptable for one who has served as a professor and academic dean, would it not?³

“Christians within this movement once encouraged one another to live as a separated people but not over-and-against other Christian groups. In fact, in the decades after the union in Lexington, most congregations that wore the name Church of Christ sought to

²Abner Jones (April 28, 1772-May 29, 1841), American minister, reformer /World Biographical Encyclopedia (prabook.com)

³Whether one describes this omission of historical data that would call Reese’s conclusion into question as an oversight or not, it can be descriptive of one who endeavors to validate his position by arguing from incomplete evidence (i.e. leaving out historical details which should bring him to a different conclusion).

unite with Christians everywhere, no matter what name they went by. The separation they sought, rather, was against the values and behaviors of the secular world around them. It was a separation marked by holiness, not exclusion. But this is a stream we hardly recognize today. We have little memory of it.” (pp. 14, 15).

Later, Reese contradicts his own account of history. On page 92 he wrote the following: “*By the time he [Alexander Campbell] departed for American, he was no longer a Presbyterian.*” Surely that can’t be right since, according to Reese, the separation they sought was not against differing religious groups but rather, “*was against values and behaviors of the secular world around them*” (p. 15). Remember the reference to John Mulkey? It was the denomination to which he previously belonged that wanted nothing to do with him because of the stance Mulkey had taken on Scripture.

Later in the book, Reese attributes the following purpose to Thomas and Alexander Campbell, stating that their purpose:

“... was not to become a new church but to work within the various denominations for reform. The ultimate objective was unity. But the effect of their efforts was negligible. **Few seemed interested in joining them. Certainly, their old Presbyterian associates were not.**” (p. 92) [emphasis mine, JM]

Why was it the case that “*their old Presbyterian associates*” were not interested? Did they not realize that the Campbell’s merely wanted to remain united with them as well as embrace other religious groups? Is Reese truly accurate in his comments and analysis, or is he ignoring writings and positions of Alexander Campbell that differ greatly from his own? In 1848, Campbell wrote:

“I had no idea of uniting with the Baptists more than with the Moravians or the mere Independents.”⁴

⁴Alexander Campbell, “Anecdotes, Incidents, and Facts,”

“When men substituted the incomprehensible dogmas of theology for the simple word of God, and when these, elaborated and systematized in the form of authoritative creeds, became the means of perpetuating division and alienation, it is not strange that some, mistaking these systems for Christianity, should denounce it as false and injurious to society, or that those who loved the truth should regard with aversion those false divisive standards and those sectarian titles and designations by which religious partyism and strife were constantly maintained. While sectarianism had thus, on the one hand, been the fruitful parent of infidelity, it had, on the other, provoked those who perceived its baleful influence to seek its overthrow, and to endeavor to restore to the world the simple gospel as it was preached in the beginning, and presented upon the faithful page of inspiration.”⁵

After two debates, one with John Walker in June of 1820, and the second with W. L. McCalla in October of 1823 (both of whom were Presbyterian preachers), Campbell wrote this:

“There are not a few who deprecate religious controversy as an evil of no small magnitude. But these are either ill-informed, or those conscious that their principles will not bear investigation. So long as there is good and evil, truth and error in this world, so long will there be opposition; for it is in the nature of good and evil, of truth and error, to oppose each other. We cheerfully confess that it is much to be regretted that controversy amongst Christians should exist; but it is more to be regretted that error, the professed cause of it, should exist.”⁶

Millennial Harbinger, Third Series – Vol. V, no. 6 (June 1848), p. 349.

⁵Robert Richardson, MEMOIRS of ALEXANDER CAMPBELL (Standard Publishing Co. Cincinnati, 1897) vol. 1, pp. 184, 185. [Note especially vol. 1, 184-225.]

⁶Alexander Campbell, Debate on Christian Baptism (Campbell vs. McCalla) [Buffalo: 1824] p. vi.

The differences between Reese's assessment of what Campbell was endeavoring to do and what Campbell himself states concerning getting away from mad-made religious division are stark. Is Reese truly unaware of what Campbell wrote?

In addition to early self-contradiction, Reese succumbs to over-reaching statements which are quite numerous. Consider the following statement about the Lexington meeting in 1831.

"Things went well on the opening day of the Lexington meetings. On the next day, New Year's Eve, they agreed that two people, one from each group, would offer a speech stating what they believed was the basis for union. Raccoon John [Smith] was chosen to speak for the Campbell churches. Barton Stone himself would speak on behalf of the congregation where he preached and the movement he had launched years before.

"What Smith and Stone said at the meeting and what the two communities of faith chose to do are largely unknown by their spiritual heirs today. **The story is rarely told. The astonishing climax of the gathering remains buried in obscurity, deemed to be trivial or irrelevant because of the distance of time and place**" (p.9) [emphasis mine, JM].

Surely Reese is aware of discussions and/or classes taking place concerning the "American Restoration Movement" on college campuses and even in congregational settings from time to time. If that has changed in recent years, it would have helped his case if he had pointed that out, but he did not. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his above statement is that the reason this story is "*rarely told*" is that it is deemed "*trivial or irrelevant*" due to "*distance of time and place.*" Is that the way most Christians feel about movements to return to Scripture in faith and practice as was the purpose of the "American Restoration Movement"? In order to make such a hasty generalization would not Reese need to know how often (or not) congregations talk about the "Restoration Movement"? It would be advantageous indeed to see his list of statistics. Does his statement not seem like an over-

reaching conclusion? Is it not also possible that to most Christians there is a more pressing need to be focused on what God's Word says and how we should apply it in our life? Perhaps this is a good place to point out that throughout Reese's book, what is conspicuously absent is an appeal to Scripture. While Reese cleverly uses the motif of water's source (Blue Hole) as the backdrop for this book, in reality, the "living water" – the true source of sustenance for God's people (John 4:10, 14; Jer. 2:13; 17:13) is clearly missing. While the religious leaders Reese mentions were very much concerned with following what is found in God's Word, Reese references Scripture only four times in chapter 1. These will be dealt with later in this review.

The subtitle of "*AT THE BLUE HOLE*" is "*ELEGY for a CHURCH on the EDGE.*" Elogy comes from the Greek word ἔλεγχος and historically refers to "*a song of mourning, a lament,*"⁷ and appears to be used in that way in the book as Reese states:

"... all churches" are "facing death, and denying it will make matters worse. Our church, my church, church as we remember it, church as we like it, church as we want it to be is dying. Churches that are propped up by our surrounding culture, where everyone we know basically believes alike and thinks alike, churches that keep strangers at arm's distance unless they are like us or want to be, churches that advantage us socially, that isolate us from pain or discomfort, churches that insulate us from hard people and hard truths are dying or already dead." (p. 21).

On page 6, he wrote: "

We...need to consider what condition Churches of Christ are in today. They have been in sharp decline for more than thirty years. The forecast for the next thirty is ominous."

⁷Liddell and Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, based on The German Work of Francis Passow (Harpers & Brothers, New York, 1874) p. 434.

Contrast that statement with what he says on page 15.

“Churches of Christ are growing in some non-American contexts, particularly in Africa and South America. But in the United States, Churches of Christ are in serious decline.”

Thankfully, after 9 pages (page 6 to page 15), Reese does make the distinction between the United States (where the Lord’s church is currently in decline) and other places in the world where it is growing, but would it not have been better to acknowledge that information close together in the text rather than 9 pages apart?⁸ While one may wonder if culture (including societal view of authority and truth) may have a role in the difference between people obeying the Gospel more readily in other countries than currently here in the USA, such an area of discussion is not so much as mentioned by Reese.

As we continue going through chapter one, Reese mentions a statement made by Malcolm Gladwell in a couple of podcasts where he referred to the Church of Christ as being “*just about the most fundamentalist of fundamentalist Christians,*” and later as “*the most strict of Southern fundamentalist denominations*” to which Reese replies “*Ouch*” and then says:

“My reaction each time was, that’s not the Church of Christ I know. I grew up in a loving, generous church, in a Church of Christ

family that taught grace.... Fundamentalist we are not.”(pp. 13, 14)

One is left to wonder how Reese defines or even perceives “fundamentalist.” The Oxford-American Dictionary defines fundamentalist as “*someone who believes in traditional forms of a religion, or believes that what is written in a holy book, such as the Christian Bible, is completely true.*” Does Reese NOT believe that the Bible is completely true? If he does not believe in any “traditional” forms of religion, exactly where does his faith lie?

His statement is also one which is non-sequitur (his implied conclusion does not follow from the statements made). Being “*fundamentalist*” neither demands nor implies that a congregation or a Christian is NOT “*loving*” or “*generous,*” nor does it mean that such congregations have not “*taught grace.*” Is it merely a lack of knowing what “fundamentalist” actually means or another illogical over-reach to make such a statement? Note the following comments from page 17.

“Truth be told, the numerical decline of Churches of Christ in America may be the best thing that could happen. As the dire state of these churches begins to sink in, **it will become increasingly apparent that we can’t fix ourselves. But here is the good news: God can.** How and toward what end is what we will pursue in the coming chapters. To be clear, no matter what Churches of Christ do, they will not likely recover their former stature or prestige. Nor should doing so be their goal. They will never become again what they once were. Even if rebuilding some version of a once-glorious past were possible, doing so would be both counterproductive and tragic. And attempting it would miss the point. But, congregation by congregation, Christian by Christian, they can become something different, something new, something healthier, something more humble, more Christlike, more faithful.” [emphasis mine, JM]

.....

“People and principles and values from our past, from our own story, could replenish us if

⁸On an interesting note, Dr. Flavil Yeakely Jr. (1934-2019) spent years in extensive research on church growth and decline. From the 1990’s into the early 2000’s, the Lord’s church was growing in many places here in the USA, including a 10% growth (on average) in the state of Virginia where I was living at that time. Moving back to Oklahoma in 2006 and seeing the apparent decline of church growth in Oklahoma and Texas, I was left to wonder what was happening in the “Bible belt” to stifle the amount of growth occurring on the East Coast. Conversely, as culture in our country continues to become more humanistic and relativistic, the decline in number of conversions per year seems to increase. Unfortunately, Reese seems oblivious to any correlation between what otherwise might be obvious.

we were open to receive them. If we sought them. If we remembered.” (p. 17).

Wait a minute. Didn’t he just say at the top of page 17 that “we can’t fix ourselves...But...God can” – but then he states that the past “could replenish us” if we sought “[p]eople and principles and values from our past”...“if we remembered”? It kind of sounds again like Reese is contradicting Reese, does it not?

Return for a moment to a statement from page 5 which was quoted earlier.

“It might be difficult for a people who have often been told that history is irrelevant to acknowledge an origin story more recent than the Pentecost of Acts 2. But claimed or unclaimed, the events of Lexington, the story of these people, still shapes them, directly and profoundly.”

Please note again that Reese’s account of “*history*” omits more historical information about “*these people*” than it includes. Furthermore, after the mention of Acts 2, the only other passages of Scripture alluded to in chapter one (pages 4–35), are found on page 26 in a paraphrastic statement of 1st Corinthians 1:12 along with rather interesting comments concerning the church in Philippi and the church in Rome. Perhaps a good question to ask is just how important does Reese believe the Bible to truly be in shaping anyone’s faith or influencing a religious “*movement*” since he seems to distance himself from Scripture like someone in the Old Testament keeping a leper at arm’s length. This is what he writes about Philippi and Rome.

“But there was conflict in all the earliest churches, even the healthier ones. The extraordinarily generous church in Philippi was slowly being torn apart because two strong and influential women were having a knock-down-drag-out. The house churches in Rome, reflecting their mixed membership of Jews and Gentiles, couldn’t seem to resolve their differences over the eating of certain foods or whether it was mandatory to celebrate certain holy days. These were highly charged matters

in which agreement seemed impossible. ... Every church in every age has struggled to find agreement. But Christian unity is especially difficult today. The polarization among churches seems to have become more acute. In some places, a kind of paralysis has set in: if we don’t change, we will die; if we do change, we will die. A classic no-win double-bind.” (p. 26)

Let’s unpack what he has stated. First, he would have us believe that the “*extraordinarily generous church in Philippi*,” one of “*the healthier ones*,” was being torn apart by something which is mentioned in only two verses in the beginning of the last chapter (4:1, 2). Compare these two verses in Philippians with Paul’s letters to the church in Corinth where problems are dealt with in many verses in multiple chapters. Is Reese suggesting a problem referenced in only two verses is indicative of a “*knock-down-drag-out*” among Christians in Philippi? Second, in connection with Christians in Rome, Reese himself has stated why they “*couldn’t seem to resolve their differences*” in an earlier statement he makes on page 21.

“We can’t cure ourselves. We can’t fix ourselves. Churches are filled with humans, and humans mess things up. Humans misread and misunderstand. We are too willful, too shortsighted, too stubborn to fix ourselves.”

Since “*we can’t cure*” or “*fix ourselves*” where do solutions to our problems lie? Once again, Reese stated the solution – “*...we can’t fix ourselves. But here is the good news: God can*” (p. 17). If Reese actually believes that “*God can*,” does he not see Paul’s inspired letter to the Christians in Rome providing guidance to solve those issues?⁹

⁹While we have not taken time to address problems which Paul confronts early in 1st Corinthians, the same comment made concerning solutions God gives to the church in Rome also applies to solving problems among the Christians in Corinth and elsewhere. While I am certain Reese knows that Paul’s letters were written by inspiration

Unfortunately, from Reese's perspective, the solution might not even be found in God's word, for "*Scripture is notoriously resistant to everyone interpreting the Bible the same*" (p. 177). Allow the impact of that statement to be absorbed. Now the question becomes whether God was capable of giving us an inspired message to which all can relate and which could be understood by every generation of humanity or whether that was even God's intent. While Reese does not state which of those alternatives he believes, one is left to wonder whether or not he might believe neither to be the case.

On page 18 his subject returns to the meeting in Lexington in 1831. Remember, unlike what Reese stated, we have already noted that 1831 is not the first time or place where the church of Christ is found. (While the discussion of "origins" can and should expand to a century much, much earlier than the 1800's and beyond the borders of this country, that topic is one for future discussions.)

"There are no remnants of the old Hill Street Church that could be memorialized. No historical marker tells the story. Then again, the movement never cared much about places and plaques."

Sort of sounds like another over-reaching conclusion, especially when one considers that there ARE a number of places and plaques that have been preserved by members of "*the movement*." After the above statement, he writes:

"But it is worthy of note that almost two centuries ago in what is now downtown Lexington, emerging from **two distinct groups**, a gathering of Christians, our spiritual ancestors, chose **peace over conflict, unity over division**. There, assembled in what had been an old cotton mill, this new movement of inde-

pendent churches, **including Churches of Christ**, found its heart and its voice. Their union was sealed with a handshake, baptized in tears, animated in embrace, confirmed in song, and sanctified at table." (p. 18) [emphasis mine, JM]

Once again, since this "*new movement*" already **included** "*Churches of Christ*" in 1831 does that not sound like Churches of Christ were already in existence? If so, how is 1831 the date when Churches of Christ "*began*"? Furthermore, in order for Reese's comment to even make sense, it is his responsibility to tell us how these "*two distinct groups*" had been in conflict and how they had been divided. If they arrived independently at similar places in both their understanding of Scripture and their abhorrence of man-made creeds of Christendom, the contention that they came together in spite of conflict and division would seem to be inaccurate, non-sequitur, and outside the realm of historical accuracy. It seems, with just the few examples we have offered of similar events and movements from 1801, 1809, 1816, that historical accuracy is not something in which Reese is necessarily interested.

One is left to wonder if Reese believes that any and/or every disagreement on a point of doctrine constitutes *conflict* and *division* or if those disagreements can actually provide a healthy dialogue by which to bring human minds closer to the truth of God's word. Though perhaps not understanding every passage exactly the same way, the respect of B. W. Stone for A. Campbell is well documented. In 1827, in a discussion of the implications of John's statement in John 1:1,

"Stone speaks thus of Mr. Campbell's labors and of the good effect they had already produced in correcting a tendency to theological speculation." "Your talents and learning we have highly respected; your course we have generally approved; your religious views in many points accord with our own; and to one point we have hoped we both were directing our efforts, which point is, to unite the flock of Christ scattered in the dark and cloudy day."

to address those issues and offer God-given solutions, he writes as though these congregations were overtaken by such seemingly insurmountable problems that it would be virtually impossible for them to ever see eye-to-eye.

We have seen you, with the arm of a Sampson and the courage of a David, tearing away the long-established foundation of partyism, human authoritative creeds and confessions; we have seen you successfully attacking many false notions and speculations in religion, and against every substitute for the Bible and its simplicity we have seen you exerting all your mighty powers. ... You have made a diversion in our favor, and to you is turned the attention of creed-makers and party-spirits, and on you is hurled their ghostly thunder. We enjoy a temporary peace and respite from war where you are known. From you we have learned more fully the evil of speculating on religion, and have made considerable proficiency in correcting ourselves.”¹⁰

How much conflict and division do you see in the above statement from Barton W. Stone concerning Alexander Campbell in 1827, four years BEFORE the 1831 meeting in Lexington?

Toward the end of chapter one, Reese states:

“Those who come from Churches of Christ, whatever name is on the church sign, have largely forgotten their own story. As a matter of choice, **they have lost their memory, which is pretty close to saying they have lost their minds.** The result is almost always tragic.” (p. 29) [emphasis mine, JM]

Here is another example of the “overly inclusive statements” (over-reach) which you will find throughout this book. Reese’s statement ignores the reality that those “*who come from Churches of Christ*” indeed **DO** have “*their own story*,” but it truly is **their** story, not the story of a “movement,” but **their own**, unique, individual story involving: **their** conversion, **their** walk with God, **their** growth in grace and knowledge as **their** understanding of God’s Word continues to grow. It would seem, however, that Reese really is not interested in YOUR story or MINE, but in an event in 1831 which he isolates from similar events prior to that

date, making 1831 “*the beginning*” and ignoring the rest. If one is concerned with an “origin story” but so selective with historical events that only what fits the conclusions you have already reached are included, how true is that story? Reese’s “*origin story*” (p. 5) is one he manipulates. Credibility in what he writes continues to be questionable at best.

Before closing my comments on this review of the first chapter of “*AT the BLUE HOLE*” let me state unequivocally that it is not my desire for this to be viewed, in any form or fashion, as a personal attack, for it is not. I have never met Jack R. Reese. However, no matter how well intended Reese’s effort might be, with the way he deals with this material, it might be difficult to receive a passing grade for chapter one of “*At the Blue Hole*” in a freshman level college class. Contextual problems that include things such as: a lack of historical research leading to faulty statements and conclusions; self-contradictions; hasty generalizations; the omission of pertinent dates and persons (perhaps because they do not fit the desired narrative); and overly inclusive statements are never a healthy approach to any subject. In such writing, “*the result is almost always tragic.*”

The book begins with statements of commendation from 25 academicians, theologians, and religious leaders from a variety of faith groups. I personally know (or have met) five of those individuals and consider them friends. I am hopeful that, in their defense, they only gave a cursory reading to Reese’s manuscript before writing their comments since the things problematic in chapter one are multiplied throughout the rest of Reese’s book. May we never be either afraid or hesitant to analyze, in depth, writings about God’s word and the church of our Lord as thoroughly as possible. [As time permits and since we have primarily dealt with the first chapter of this book (and passages relating back to chapter one), I anticipate there may be more to come.]

May truth always be our quest!

¹⁰Richardson, op. cit. (vol. 2, pp. 200, 201)



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True Bible Scholars

Hugh Fulford

Robert R. Taylor (10/30/1931 – 3/28/2023) was an excellent student of the Scriptures and a fine gospel preacher. For over seventy years, beginning when he was still in college, it was Robert's habit to read through the New Testament every month and the Old Testament every year. Figure it up... rounding it off to an even seventy years, Robert read systematically through the Old Testament seventy times and through the New Testament 840 times! This did not include additional hours of study in the sacred text for sermons, Bible classes, articles (he was a prolific writer), and the thirty or more books that he wrote.

Additionally, brother Taylor memorized ten verses of scripture every day. He re-memorized Psalm 119 (the longest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses) every February. Over a period of twenty-seven years (1980 – 2007, inclusive), I conducted six meetings with Robert and the good church in Ripley, TN. On one occasion, he and I were having lunch and I made the comment that I had learned that scripture once memorized did not stay memorized... that you had to keep reviewing it and re-memorizing it. Brother Taylor gave my comment a hearty "Amen!"

Robert loved the word of God and he loved those who loved it.

Sometime before brother Taylor's death on March 28 of this year, Terry Gardner, one of the administrators of the Friends of the Restoration website, asked Robert for his list of preachers he had known who were the best Bible scholars. I found Robert's list interesting (I will share it below), and it set me to thinking, "Who would I regard as the best Bible scholars I have known, and what would be my criteria for regarding them as such?" Here is Robert's list and beyond that is my criteria and list.

In order from one to ten, brother Taylor listed: Guy N. Woods, Gus Nichols, B.C. Goodpasture, Noel Meredith, Franklin Camp, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Garland Elkins, Curtis Cates, Tom Warren, and C.R. Nichol. I knew all of these men, heard all of them preach (some of them on many occasions), and some of them were special friends. (Note: I knew Curtis Cates, but never heard him preach. I did not know C.R. Nichol, though I did hear him speak one time in chapel when I was a student at Freed-Hardeman College, and I have read his writings). I would concur with brother Taylor that all of these

men were great Bible scholars and great preachers. (Note: Not all great scholars are necessarily great preachers and not all great preachers are necessarily great scholars, though some are both, as were all the men on brother Taylor's list). Now to my criteria and my list.

On what basis do I determine a man's worth to be recognized as a Bible scholar? While advanced formal training is desirable and can be beneficial, this is not the sole determining factor for true biblical scholarship. On brother Taylor's list were men like Guy N. Woods, Gus Nichols (who studied the Bible five hours every day), and Franklin Camp (who studied the Bible at least five hours every day). None of these men had formal theological training, but they were great Bible scholars!

For me to consider a man a true Bible scholar, the following are necessary: 1) a commitment to the verbal inspiration of the Bible and its absolute authority; 2) a commitment to the restoration plea and its principles, 3) a comprehension of the undenominational nature of the church and who reflects this comprehension in his thinking, writing, and speaking, and 4) a commitment to living a life above reproach, a life untarnished by worldliness and immoral behavior. While I recognize the worth of some denominational men of learning and have profited from their insights, I cannot regard them as true Bible scholars since many of them do not comprehend God's simple plan of salvation, nor the church as set forth in the New Testament, nor the simplicity of New Testament worship. When a person cannot understand these relatively simple truths, I have difficulty in regarding him as a scholar in the true sense of the word.

So, given my criteria, who are ten men I have known (or been familiar with) in my lifetime that I regard as genuine Bible scholars?

Frank Van Dyke, chairman of the Bible Department at Freed-Hardeman College for a number of years, including the years that I was a student there, and under whom I had a number of extremely important courses. Some of us preacher boys often compared him to the great J. W. McGarvey. Brother

Van Dyke also was an able preacher and I have in my possession a few of his handwritten sermon outlines.

Alan Highers, my longtime friend (going back to our student days at Freed-Hardeman). I know of no one whose insights and understanding of scripture I respect more than Alan's. For fifteen years he conducted the Open Forum at the annual Freed-Hardeman University Bible Lectureship where he dealt with a wide range of Bible and Bible-related questions, as well as a host of issues and challenges facing the church. Alan is an outstanding preacher, teacher, lecturer, writer, and editor.

Wayne Jackson, who, in addition to being a great student of the Scriptures, was also an excellent preacher and a prolific writer whose numerous works have been beneficial to many.

The remaining seven in no particular order and without mentioning their educational credentials or the important teaching and administrative positions that they held in various of our Christian colleges and universities, are: William Woodson, Clyde Woods, Jack P. Lewis, Everett Ferguson, F. Furman Kearley, Homer Hailey, and W. B. West.

Most of the above men had/have multiple advanced degrees from some of our country's most prestigious universities and theological seminaries, but they "kept their feet on the ground" and remained true to their commitment to the authority of the inspired word of God and the plea to go back to the Bible for all that we teach, believe, and practice in the realm of religion. I realize that others would have a different list. But, as I sometimes point out, my weekly column is "HUGH'S News & Views," so this is HUGH'S list of men reflecting true biblical scholarship.

Caveat: The above lists (both Robert Taylor's and mine) do not mean that I would necessarily agree with every viewpoint or position that any of these men might take on a particular text or subject. But I respect their biblical scholarship and learning and have been greatly benefited by them.

WHY I *MUST* BE INVOLVED IN **Missions**

Marricus Ellis

(Note: these questions were presented in a class on the subject)

Biblically speaking, what is mission work?

Biblically speaking, mission work is the command of God to all who are called by Him. It is not just the work of the preacher or evangelist, rather it is the work of the Christian. Paul says in Rom 10:17 “And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” Moreover, Jesus says:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt.28:19-20).

All who are in Christ and have declared him as both savior and Lord over their lives, must obey this call. Mission work helps us fulfill God’s desire to bring His kingdom on earth (Matt.6:10). God has made us in His image that we may go out into the world and help others to bear that image.

We see this carried out in the early church. At one point the gospel was only being preached in Jerusalem, but God had greater plans for His word to go further than Jerusalem. His desire was for it to go to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). We see this beginning to be fulfilled in Acts ch. 8. Acts 8:1 says:

“And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Then in v.4: “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” This is what mission work looks like, Biblically speaking—going everywhere preaching the word!

Who should be involved in mission work, and to what degree?

Although being a missionary is a work, just as a preacher, deacon, or elder, and just as not everyone is called to function in those positions, I don’t think everyone is called to be a missionary. However, I do believe everyone who is in Christ should have a role in mission work; for I believe the only reason God doesn’t take us to heaven after we profess Christ is because he wants us to do missions. Mission work can look different for everyone, for some it is taking a group trip with the church to another state or another country, for others it could look like going to the neighbor around the corner. However you can spread the gospel in your context and in your circumstance can play a pivotal role in mission work.

Sometimes we belittle the mission work that can take place in our own context. This happens when we confuse being a *missionary* with doing *mission work*. Not all are called to be missionaries, but all *are* called to do mission work. Wherever you are and wherever you go, teach, and show people Jesus. In doing so, you fulfill the great commission.

What is the proper motivation for mission work?

I believe the proper motivation for mission work is found in Paul’s words about Israel in Rom.10:1 “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is ***that they may be saved***” [emphasis mine].

This should be *our* motivation when it comes to mission work, that others might be saved. Mission work shouldn't just consist of doing good things for people (for that doesn't save), but it *must* include the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves mankind (Rom. 1:16).

We see a great example of this motivation for mission work in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth. As he defends his apostolic authority in ch. 9 and reminds the church how he is free from all men, but yet he has made himself a slave for Christ, he says

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:20-23).

Here's our motivation: we should want others to share in the blessings of God through Christ Jesus!

This was the joy Philip had when calling Nathaniel in John 1:44ff, and the joy the Samaritan woman had after speaking with Jesus at the well in John 4:29. We should all be telling someone "Come see a man!"

How do we know that God cares about mission work? Is it mandated by God?

We know God cares about mission work because he desires all men to be saved. 1 Tim. 2:3-4 says:

"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The only way for us to have a hand in saving all people is for us to GO to all people. We see the early church going everywhere, preaching the word of God—we are called to do the exact same thing. We know God cares because he calls us to GO (Matt. 28:19-20). Mission work is therefore rooted in the nature of God who sends and saves. It is God's project that we are allowed to participate in. Although the term mission work is not used in Scripture, it is surely implied by our great commission.

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"Lord, That I Might Receive My Sight"

Bill Howard

These were the words spoken to Jesus by one who was blind and believed Jesus had the answer to his dilemma. Jesus was on His last trip to Jerusalem. He 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.¹ 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 this is how Bartimaeus learned it was Jesus the multitude was following. Having this awareness of the Lord, he cried out: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." 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 fulfill for His Father; yet He still had concern for those who need-

ed 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 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 had healed those who were ill, who healed the blind man at Bethsaida, who made whole those who had leprosy, who caused the crippled and maimed to be able to walk, and perhaps Bartimaeus even heard about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead 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 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

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.

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 Bartimaeus 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 blindness that is 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 thirty-three 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 it would be called Jesus, and that 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 then it is only through Him that it can be accomplished. “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” (Revelation 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 that He has offered? We have no way of knowing, but we do know that the time will run out sooner or later. Peter tells us that 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 1 Thessalonians 4 and 2 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 our 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 that 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 the 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 made the statement there are worse things than being literally blind. That is an absolute. Blindness is inconvenient but can be dealt with, and many do so. However, there are other areas in which people can be blind (not literally) 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 that 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).



Looking Carefully at **ROMANS** **CHAPTER TWO**

Gantt Carter

What do you know about the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans? In this author's experience, it seems this chapter is occasionally avoided, or used as a theological weapon. Regardless, this letter is one of the greatest works ever penned, and chapter two is no exception to that greatness. Let us examine this text together from 3 questions or angles.

An Identification – Who?

Who is the “man” addressed in Romans 2:1? It seems clear that Romans 1:18-32 is about the nations (non-Jews), and their overall rejection of the true God. The phrase, “therefore you have no excuse, O man,”¹ in 2:1 flows out of the previous section but shows a shift to those who judge others for committing such acts that they participate in themselves. One popular idea is that the ethnic Jews are the ones “under the gun” now—but is that neces-

sarily the case?

It is possible that this “O man” is a religious non-Jew, perhaps an ethical pagan of sorts (a “pagan moralist” or philosopher). Then again, this portion of the letter may simply be to anyone who fits this bill of judgmental hypocrisy, Jew or otherwise (note 2:9-11). Paul does not specifically address the Jews until verse seventeen, and then it is with a “but if” transitional statement. Are we to read backwards? He writes of both Jews and Greeks in 9-13 (compare 1:16), and then the non-Jews in 14-16.

One strong point in favor of the “man” being a Jew is the similar argumentation in 2:21-24. However, that paragraph is different in at least a couple key areas. One, the discussion is particularly centered on the Torah and teaching/preaching it to others. Two, it is about Israel's work in serving as a light to the nations (see 3:1-4). Instead of fulfilling that role, they dishonored God by breaking His Law, and caused God's name to be blasphemed by the nations.

Romans 2:1-5 says nothing about the Torah, and the discussion of sins/condemnation continues from

¹ All Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments. Crossway, 2016.

1:28-32. Note “practice such things” in 1:32 and in 2:1, 2, 3. This last verse of Romans 1 is about those who engage in these behaviors and those who lend their support to such. As chapter two begins, Paul then turns to those nodding their head in haughty agreement with Paul. When he addresses the Jews directly later in the letter, he refers to the Mosaic covenant, the Law (“those who know the law”), circumcision, and the like (2:17; 3:1, 19; 7:1; 9:4). There are also clear passages where Paul directly writes to non-Jews (Romans 11:13-36).

Seneca is one example of this type of pagan with a conscious sense of ethical realities. He held himself above others in this way, but with clear hypocritical consequences. It seems that the Holy Spirit through Paul predicts how some will react pridefully to 1:18-32, and so He brings them down a notch or two in 2:1-5. When we acknowledge the truth of Divine justice, we are condemning ourselves in the process (consenting to our own condemnation).

“Many among the Jewish people of Paul’s day typified the moralist; but his words in Romans 2:1-16 seem to have a wider application. For example, there was Seneca, the Roman politician, moral teacher and the tutor of Nero. He would agree wholeheartedly with Paul regarding the morals of most pagans, but a man like Seneca would think, ‘I’m different from those immoral people.’ Many Christians admired Seneca and his strong stand for “morals” and “family values... But too often he tolerated in himself vices not so different from those which he condemned in others – the most flagrant instance being his connivance at Nero’s murder of his mother Agrippina.”²

Does this passage speak to those today who try to live morally without God? Remember: One can live a relatively ethical life, but without God, they have no sensible reason to do so. As well, one has no ultimate standard to define right/wrong, or to give

value to anything in the world, including life, feelings, and actions. Nonetheless, pagans attempting to claim morality still exist in some form today.

Are we ever guilty as Christians today of reading texts and only applying them to others? Maybe it is when we study Jesus’ interactions with groups like the Pharisees...

Romans 2:17-3:8 seems to be one basic unit of thought or argument, although the thought picks back up in 3:9-20. How distinctive is this from 2:1-16 then?

Are we to take 2:1-5 as a direct address to (at least a portion of) the recipients of the letter? The grammar could be merely a form of rhetoric, but that is certainly only a possibility. We know Paul writes this document to the holy ones in ancient Rome (1:7), and that absolutely includes non-Jews (1:13-15). It seems reasonable to conclude that he does not directly write to his Jewish hearers until the 2:17 mark, with 2:12-16 serving as the “handoff” paragraph and 2:17 as the transitional point itself.

The question of the identification is a technical one. Does it make an enormous difference? No. It does not even change the flow or interpretation of the text, at least as a whole. But it is a part of the study of this text, so it is worth considering.

Our Salvation – What?

In discussions regarding our justification per the content of the Roman letter, chapters three through five are usually the ones investigated and promoted. That part of the letter does provide us with valuable information about the law of faith and the way grace is ours through Jesus. However, if we skip over the second chapter, it may be easier of us to end up with a soteriology³ that is a bit too shallow, or worse.

The ancient pagan world did not have a concept of a final judgment before a Deity or the deities. Many of the Jews, even in Paul’s day, did hold to a

² “Enduring Word Bible Commentary Romans Chapter 2.” Enduring Word, 16 Mar. 2023, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/romans-2/>.

³ A fancy way to refer to the way we view salvation, our theology of deliverance from sin and into His kingdom.

belief in God being a good Creator who would one day right all wrongs and bring all us into a judgment setting (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). We can see this belief present in several of the conversations in the gospel accounts, or in the way Paul presents the coming judgment to the pagans in Acts 17:30-31; cf. 24:24-25. Such a presentation is remarkably absent from the speeches given before Jewish and “God-fearing” groups. The pressing issue with the Jews was not whether there is a coming judgment day, but the question of the Messiah’s identity.

There is the claim that our salvation from our sin has nothing to do with works at all, no matter the type of works or the way they might relate to salvation. The idea of a final judgment scene based on our behavior is often dismissed. Ironically, Romans 3-4 is sometimes appealed to in support of this claim of a “works-free” judgment. The Holy Spirit never makes that claim, and says quite the opposite in this section of the same letter (and not the only section in Scripture to do that). Consider the following from just one paragraph in Romans 2:

- God “will render to each one according to his works” (2:6)
- He grants eternal life to those seeking “glory, honor, and immortality” (2:7)
- He gives the opposite to those who seek self and disobey “the truth” (2:8)
- Our Creator will give “tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil” (2:9)
- He will bless “everyone who does good” with “glory and honor and peace” (2:10)

We could attempt to draw a strong line between Romans 2 and the rest of the letter, but this writer is not convinced that that is wise or appropriate, given the letter itself. Aside from the need to prove that such a line is warranted from the text/context in the first place, please note: The language in 2:6-11 corresponds well to 1:16-17, where we read of how the good news of Jesus is the Divine power to save all, both Jew and Greek. 1:16 says, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” and then 2:9 and 2:10 both say, “the Jew first and also the Greek.” (In the Greek

text, 1:16 and 2:10 are the exact same phrase, two words are in different forms in 2:9). This judgment is impartial as far as matters like ethnicity go (2:11). It is a “day when, according to my [showing Paul’s personal connection to it] gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (2:16). It is helpful for us to realize that “works” is not always employed in the same sense within the pages of Holy Writ, and that accessing salvation (grace-gospel) has never been entirely unconditional on our part.

It is also of value to reflect on the future aspect of the judgment in 2:6-11, and 12-16. It is not something that happens in the past, or even the present; it is about what God will give one day to those who obey versus those who disobey. Romans 14:10-12 provides some additional confirmation in this letter for the future judgment scene of all humanity.

If I begin to think that God will not judge us both “according to [our] works” and “according to [the] gospel,” then I may need to start over in my understanding of salvation. The truth is a bit stronger and more balanced than many in the religious world suggest. Finally, in further contextual balance, we realize that the same God who brings a day of wrath and will render according to works is the same God who possesses riches of kindness, forbearance, and patience (2:4-6).

See also Romans 2:2-3, 5, 15-16; 6:1-23; 8:1-11; along with passages like James 1:22-27; 2:14-26.

The second chapter of Romans, with the more covenantal angle of the role of Israel in God’s plan (2:17-29), provides a crucial foundation as we continue reading the letter. As noted above, the Jews were to shine the light of Divine wisdom and glory to the other nations of the world (cf. Matthew 5:14-16). Overall, they failed, but that’s a separate point. Then there is the larger point of how Jesus comes as a Jew and does not fail in anything (see Romans 3:21-26).

Then in 2:25-29, we see an important distinction and definition regarding who true Jews are in God’s sight. Being a part of God’s people is always about how one lives before Him from their heart, and not about rituals or only the outward appearance one

gives. “His praise is not from man but from God” (2:29b). Which one are you? One who appears to serve Jesus, or someone who does so authentically?

Our salvation is only by the gospel, and how we live (even in direct connection to it) matters more than some may think/teach.

A Declaration – Why?

The Bible is ultimately about God. The overall story of Israel and the rest of the story of Scripture is about the coming Messiah (Luke 24:25-27, 44-49). He is a member of the Divine trinity and is thus God en clothed in human flesh (John 1:1-18; Philip-pians 2:1-11; 1 John 1:1-4). This is the message of the Bible, the glory of God through the lens of the suffering and the exaltation of the Messiah. Our justification and transformation in the Messiah fol-lows from the above. Our chapter in Romans is no different in its overall emphasis and application. We see the greatness of God’s nature and work very present in these inspired words.

For those who preach and teach, is the focus of our messages on God and the Messiah? Is every-thing we proclaim and explain grounded in this ul-timate reality? If not, why not?

Paul refers to Deity about twenty-one times in the twenty-nine verses, as we have it, of the second chapter of Romans.⁴ His justice is right; His mercy is mighty; His wrath is waiting; His judgment is impartial and cuts into human hearts to reveal their secrets; His love and justness are both found in the gospel. We live our lives “before” Him, and we dis-honor Him by our disobedience. His praise is on those who see and seek Him, those also seeking the rewards He bestows (like His peace).

God is the main active one here—His judgment is what “rightly falls” and is that from which we wish to escape (2:1-5). He will bring this judgment day, and we will stand before His judgment seat (2:6-10). Unlike us, “God shows no partiality”

(2:11). It is before Him that we desire to be right-eous, for He will judge our hearts on that coming day (2:12-16). God set up the nation of Israel to take His goodness and His truth to the rest of the world (2:17-25). He Himself came into world as the truest Israelite. God created us all as His image bearers, and He cares about the nature of our hearts (2:26-29). Praise Him!

He is kind in forgiving our past failures, patient with us in our current struggles, and He has the grace and love to bring us to a place of “no con-demnation;” all within the Messiah’s covenant (Romans 2:4, 10; 3:24-25; 8:1-2, 31-39).

For those who preach and teach, may we remind ourselves the goodness of God is meant to motivate us to repentance and service. The wrath of God has its role in motivation, but it is far from the primary or final motivator of human hearts.

We turn from our idols and to the only true and living God. We serve Him while we await Jesus’ blessed return. Everything we do is for His glory; we are His, to the glory of His grace. Please read Romans 1:21-25; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Timothy 1:8-14.

The declaration is this: God is good, and His goodness leads us down the pathway of repentance (Romans 2:4)! Is that how you view God and His work in your life?

Final Words

God is so good. He rescues us from sin as He calls us out of our hypocrisy. There is nothing good or right apart from Him. We are to obey the truth of His Word as we look toward the glorious future that awaits the faithful (per His promises). We will not obey perfectly in this life, so we are dependent on His loving-kindness for our peace now, and for our hope in peering beyond today. His will is working toward a time when judgment comes upon the wicked, and all is made right for His people.

⁴ Chapters and verses were not originally in the Scriptures – they were added a few hundred years ago as an aid.

Be Wise, O KINGS

Adam Cozort



The wisest of all kings, Solomon, wrote: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). As you consider the words of the second Psalm, the contrast is made between the kings of the earth and the King on God’s holy hill.

The kings of the earth do everything they can to remove God from before them. They desire to “break their bonds” and “cast away their cords” (Psalm 2:3). They do not want to be obedient to God, nor do they want the influence of God’s Word hanging over their heads. Therefore, they are willing to go to great lengths to try to irradicate the problem.

Yet the problem will not go away. There is no action they can take that will remove God’s Law from over their heads. There is no land to which they can turn that is not under the authority of God. In fact, God laughs in derision at the feeble attempts of mankind to ignore or circumvent His Law (2:4-5).

What do you do when you cannot change the law, overthrow the one who gave it, or hide from its consequences? There are only two choices: you can either obey the commands, or face the consequences attached to them.

Therefore, God calls upon the kings of this world to be wise and be willing to be instructed as to what should be done (2:10). They are encouraged to serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, and kiss the Son who sits on the throne. In order to save themselves, they must resign their whole heart to Him. Those who are blessed are they who put their trust in God.

But wait... this does not sound like freedom or liberty, but like we are being told we must choose between two options: God or punishment. The reality of truth is that is exactly the ultimate choice man must make. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Additionally, Paul wrote in Romans 6:16: “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”

God’s call still goes out to, “be wise, O kings.” But that call does not just cry out to the leaders of nations on the earth. It goes out to every individual. Regardless of what the kings of the world do, we have the choice to make as to whether or not we will put our trust in Him.

In the New Testament, the preachers of the Gospel point back to the second Psalm as an important passage verifying and establishing the authority Jesus holds and the continued choices we have today (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5). Listen to the message of Psalm 2 and be wise.



THE *Chronological* LIFE OF CHRIST PART ONE: WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

Bradley S. Cobb

Before we can do a study of the chronological life of Christ, we have to answer the question, *Why are there four different gospel accounts?* That question includes other questions, like, *Why didn't God just use one? Why is some information included in one and left out in another? Why don't some of the accounts of (supposedly) the same event agree with each other?*

In order to answer these questions (and they need to be answered before we do a serious study of the life of Christ), we will take a brief look at each gospel and find out what makes it different from the others, and most importantly *why*.

Some people make accusations against the Bible, accusing it of contradictions because quotes are given differently by different gospel writers, because different people are identified in certain scenes, or even because sometimes the same (so they claim) incident seems to take place in different places in the various accounts. On the other hand, when the accounts agree almost verbatim, the same critics accuse the writers of colluding and copying, and therefore say they aren't trustworthy. Tell you what, that's a great job if you can get it—if they agree, you can't trust them; if they disagree, you can't trust them... I win!

Let's say you see a car crash, and the police request you to write down what happened. Are you

going to remember every single detail? Of course not. Now imagine they found another witness, and asked them to do the same thing. Are they going to write the same thing you did, word for word? Do you think there might be some details they include that you didn't? Now let's assume there is a third witness, who is close friends with one of the drivers—do you think their account will vary slightly in some details from yours? And lastly, let's assume the police officer takes interviews with the witnesses and writes down an account of what happened—will his account be identical to any of the others? Each witness (and the police officer) write what happened, but it is from a slightly different perspective, bringing their own background in, causing them to notice things that the others might not have noticed—and yet each can still be called reliable witnesses.

Each of the gospels has a different starting point, a different audience, and a different vantage point. But they each tell the same story of our glorious Savior!

Matthew

Even just a surface reading at the first gospel account lets you know, *This guy likes the Old Testament*. Matthew constantly references the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, usually by

saying something akin to, “this happened so that it might be fulfilled what was written by the prophet...” The constant references to the Old Testament as proof for Jesus as the promised King, the Messiah, would have only been important to one group of people—the Jews.

It is commonly accepted by almost every Bible student and scholar that Matthew wrote his gospel account to a Jewish audience. He wanted his fellow countrymen to believe in Jesus as the promised King, and so wrote with that thought in mind. In fact, some of the earliest surviving Christian writings after the time of the apostles make this same point.

The earliest evidence says Matthew wrote this gospel account within a decade of Jesus’ death. Why does this matter? For one, it is quite possible that it was written and circulating amongst Jewish Christians even before Gentiles (starting with Cornelius) were welcomed into the church. Unlike Luke, Matthew doesn’t go out of his way to show Jesus’ compassion and interaction with Gentiles—don’t get me wrong, Matthew does include some interactions, but it isn’t as obvious as it is in Luke, who wrote *after* Gentiles were welcomed into the church.

Matthew also wrote as an *eyewitness*. Certainly, some of the things he recorded were things relayed to him by other apostles (or by direct revelation from God), but remember that he *saw* most of these things, *heard* Jesus talking, and his gospel account was a testimony to the Jews of the truthfulness of Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew begins his account with a genealogy—and modern readers scream *No!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* But he starts here because it traces the lineage of *Abraham*—God promised Abraham that his seed (descendant) would bless the whole world. It goes to Isaac and Jacob—God reiterated this promise to each of them. It goes through Judah—prophecy was made that “the scepter [kingship] will not depart from Judah.” It then traces to *David*—God promised a descendant of David would rule forever. And it includes Zerubbabel—God promised this man he was the one through whom the promised King

would come.

This genealogy shows Jesus was (1) an Israelite, and more specifically (2) a Jew [of the tribe of Judah], (3) a direct royal descendant of David, and (4) a legal heir to the throne. Each one of these items was essential to establish to gain credibility with Jewish readers interested in hearing about Jesus.

Matthew also spends an inordinate amount of space dealing with the corruption of the Jewish religious leaders—specifically the scribes and Pharisees (see chapter 23)—and the impending destruction of Jerusalem (see chapters 23-24). The other writers address these things, but not to the extent that Matthew does, *because of his audience*.

Mark

My oldest daughter read the first three chapters of Mark one day, and said it was very fast-paced. You’ll notice that the word “immediately” (or if you use the KJV, *straightway*) shows up *a lot*. Mark didn’t spend an awful lot of time dealing with details and discussions, but showed Jesus as a man of action. This is because his audience expected it.

It is generally agreed that Mark wrote to a *Roman* audience. They liked action, action, action. If you counted up the *words* of Jesus in Matthew, and divided that in half, it’d still be more than Mark records. But Mark shows Jesus as a man on the move, someone who is always doing something.

The Romans were used to extremely biased biographies. Once, when a new Caesar ascended the throne, a biography was produced that said “The gospel [good news] of “that Caesar, “son of _____” [one of the Roman gods]. Of course, this was a lie to build up the mythos around the Caesar. But notice how Mark begins: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of the God.” (though most translations don’t include it, the Greek says “*the* God.”)

We know Mark isn’t writing to Jews, even though he himself was one, because he actually translates Hebrew/Aramaic phrases for his readers. Additionally, there are a couple places where Mark actually uses Latin words—and doesn’t translate or explain them, which implies his original audience

was at least familiar with Latin.

While Matthew begins with a genealogy, then the miraculous birth of Jesus, Mark starts with the ministry of John the Baptizer, leading very quickly to the baptism of Jesus at 30 years old. No extensive background or backstory here.

Mark spends more time, as a percentage of the whole book, dealing with the last week of Jesus' life than any of the other authors. And all of this is because he knew his audience.

Luke

Luke wrote 25% of the New Testament, which is quite impressive, especially since he was (1) not an eyewitness, and (2) a Gentile. Luke's audience seemed to be more Greek-influenced. Luke focuses more on Jesus' interaction with the poor, with women, and with Gentiles. Being a physician, Luke also had an eye for detail, giving more specific words for certain medical ailments than other writers, describing more of Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, etc.

Luke has also been called a "first rate historian" by a one-time atheist who fully intended to disprove the Bible. Luke shows Jesus as a real person, in a real place, and at a specific time (just read the beginning of Luke 3 to see the amount of historical detail Luke gives).

Luke interviewed several eyewitnesses to the events he records (almost certainly including Mary, the mother of Jesus), as well as checking some of the already-in-circulation gospel accounts, which would certainly include Matthew, and perhaps Mark.¹ And with divine guidance from the Holy Spirit, he organized the information in a predominantly chronological order (with one flashback explaining why John the Baptizer was in prison).

Luke begins with the miraculous conception of

¹ Many make the claim that Mark wrote first, and that Matthew and Luke expanded on his work—as though Matthew wasn't able to write his account without help from a person who was a teenager—if that—when Jesus died. The earliest evidence points to Matthew writing first.

John the Baptizer, followed quickly by the miraculous conception of Jesus. Luke is the only author who describes Jesus being taken to the Temple as an infant, and the only one who gives us any words and actions of Jesus between His birth and His arrival to be baptized by John (see chapter 2).

Luke also gives a genealogy of Jesus, but if you compare it with Matthew's, you'll notice some differences: (1) Matthew's goes forward to Jesus, Luke's goes backwards from Jesus, (2) Matthew skips some generations, Luke doesn't. But most startlingly, (3) Matthew gives a different genealogy from David to Zerubbabel, and from Zerubbabel to Joseph than Luke does. We will deal with those differences when we get there. Suffice it to say, Luke chose to give a (still-accurate) genealogy that would hit home for his readers—which was different from the one Matthew chose.

John

As far as the life of Jesus goes, Matthew starts with the birth of Christ, Mark starts with the baptism of Christ, Luke starts with the announcement of the conception of Christ. But John outdoes any of them—he starts with the life of Jesus before creation!

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Harkening back to Genesis 1:1, John shows Jesus as more than just a man, but as the loving God who became flesh (John 1:14).

John's audience appears to be more general than the others. His whole purpose in writing was not to give all the places Jesus went, the people He met, or the miracles He performed. John wrote to help people believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31). So he wrote to support this aim.

After showing the pre-existence of Jesus, he moves to just after Jesus was baptized, with John the Baptizer pointing out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

John's account contains a lot of information not found in the other three accounts, including Jesus' first miracle (water into wine), the first time He

cleared out the Temple, His own baptizing of others (through His disciples, He didn't do it personally), the raising of Lazarus, and several others. John seems to focus more on things Jesus did in Judea, while the other writers spend more time on His ministry in Galilee.

Summary

Matthew wrote to show the Jews that Jesus was their long-awaited King.

Mark wrote to show the Romans that Jesus was the true Son of God (unlike the Caesars).

Luke wrote to show the Greeks the humanity and compassion of Jesus the man.

John wrote to show the world that Jesus is the loving God in the Flesh who died to take away sin.

Each of the four purposes show up in all four gospel accounts to a lesser degree, but these are (generalized) the main thrusts of each of the four gospel accounts.

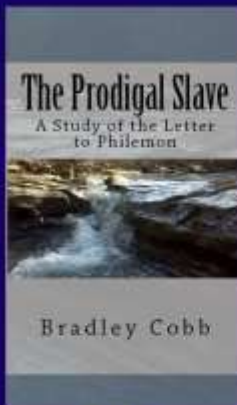
What does this mean for us today?

God thought it was important—perhaps even necessary—to give us four different gospel accounts, each with a different focus, a different audience, and a different writer's viewpoint. This fact alone shows us different people will respond to different approaches. To reach the Jews, Matthew showed Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy—but that would have meant next to nothing to Mark's Roman readers (Mark as narrator only refers to the Old Testament twice).

This also shows us the gospel is for *everyone*! As Paul said, "...the gospel of Jesus Christ... is the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe: to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

[Note: I am teaching this material each week, and posting the notes at TheCobbSix.com. So in case you don't want to wait for the next issue, they're there. As of this writing, we're on lesson eight.

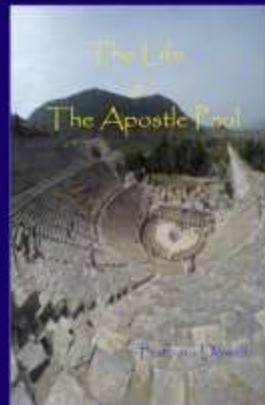
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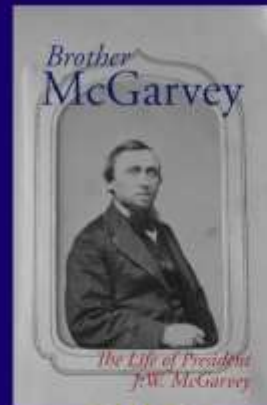
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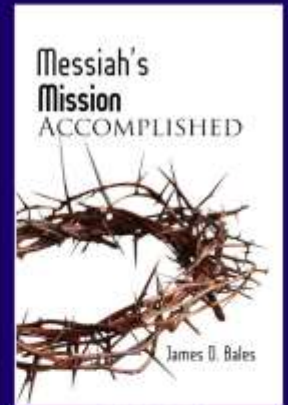
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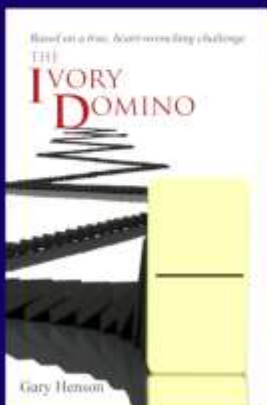
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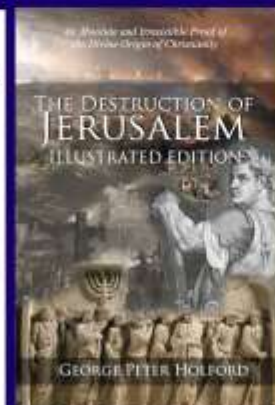
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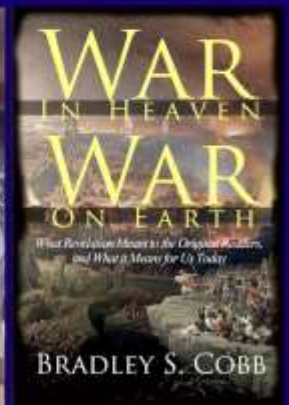
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1 CORINTHIANS 3

A new translation and commentary

Matthew Shaffer

“And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as if to spiritual men, but rather as to fleshly men, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able. Even now you are not able, for you are still fleshly. For where there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and do you not behave according to your humanity? For whenever someone says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not human?

Therefore, what is Apollos? What is Paul? We are servants through whom you believed, and each has what the Lord gave him. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth; thus, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but rather God, who causes growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are one thing, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own work. For we are workers of God, and you are

God’s field, and God’s building.

According to the grace of God that was given to me, I laid the foundation like a wise master builder, but another is building on it. Let each one who builds be careful how he builds, for no one is able to lay any other foundation than the one that has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ. And if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, and straw, then each one’s work will be made visible, for the day will make it clear, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire will test what kind of work belongs to each one. If anyone’s work, which he has built, remains, he will receive a word. If anyone’s work is consumed by the fire, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which

temple you are.

Let no one deceive himself – if anyone among you seems to be wise in this present age, let him become a fool so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written:

‘He catches the wise in their own craftiness’

And again:

‘The Lord knows the thoughts of those who are wise – that they are empty.’

So that no one should boast in men, for all things belong to you – whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things that are, or things yet to come – all things belong to you. But you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

NOTE: I have no special notes to make about the translation of this chapter. All of the translations I have compared agree in the meaningful substance of this chapter and only differ in matters of style.

Let Him Become a Fool ***Comments on 1 Corinthians 3***

Introduction

In the first two chapters, Paul laid out the principles of Christian unity, then demonstrated the nature of the wisdom and strength that sustain us in the gospel. God has chosen to save us through something counter-intuitive – a crucified Christ – something that seems foolish and weak to us, so we can see that God is operating from a different kind of logic than we understand. We are not in a position to judge or critique God’s logic, but we can learn from it. God’s Spirit has, through revelation, taught us how to think as God thinks – something that we could not know without His help. According to our natural, human state, we cannot discern what God has accomplished in His Son. If we learn what the Spirit will teach us, we will be able to discern as if we have the mind of Christ.

Now that he has established these things in principle, Paul turns his attention to the practical application. It is one thing to prove that we *should* abandon human wisdom and follow God’s Spirit alone,

but it is another thing entirely to accomplish it. How can we set aside our preconceived notions about what is logical and what is not? In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul begins to answer this question – using the divisions in Corinth as an example.

1-4

There is spiritual wisdom, and it is taught by God’s Spirit to those who will learn from Him, but that was not where the Corinthian Christians began. Paul told us before that he had determined not to use human wisdom when he taught the Corinthians, since he perceived that they needed to understand the fundamentals first – they needed to learn to trust in God’s power, not to reason about esoteric subjects (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). There is much that can and should be built on this foundation, but the foundation must come first. Therefore, he could not speak to them as spiritual men – people whose minds were prepared to reason through the spiritual truths of God’s word – but he had to treat them as spiritual infants. They needed milk, sustenance that would help them develop on a foundational level until they were ready for solid food.

But they had not matured. They were not ready to keep growing. They had been born, spiritually, when they were baptized, but they had yet to grow out of infancy. Paul knew this because they were experiencing divisions based, in part, on human leaders and egos. God’s spiritual wisdom will never tear His people apart through jealousy and strife, so the presence of these kinds of divisions made it clear that something less than divine was driving their decisions.

This means their factions – however good and right their chosen “ringleader” or rallying point might be – were human in nature. Paul and Apollos were both worthy of respect as faithful leaders among God’s people, but those who learned from them had a responsibility to recognize them as servants of God, not the originator of the gospel, their salvation, or their enlightenment. They were right to accept what Paul taught because of Christ, who stood behind the gospel of Paul. They would be wrong to follow Paul because of *Paul*. He was not

right because he was Paul, he was right because he belonged to Christ.

5-9

Paul drives this point home by comparing himself and Apollos to farmers working in a field. If Paul planted a seed and Apollos watered it, could either of them claim that they made the seed grow? Certainly not. They would each have served a role that helped to create an ideal environment for the seed. Paul would have labored to find and till good soil that would allow the crop to grow without interference from roots, rocks, overly packed soil, or any other obstacle. Likewise, Apollos would have continued to care for the seed as it grew, making sure it had plenty of water to feed the process. However, neither of them could claim that they *made* the plant because neither had the power to *make* a seed, nor give it the innate ability to grow. Only God has that power. All the planting and the water in the world would accomplish nothing if the seed did not exist in the first place.

Likewise, Paul and Apollos had labored in the Corinthian congregation to plant the seed of God's word and nourish its growth, but no one could give either of them the credit for the existence of a congregation in that place. They had to begin with a seed, something which neither of them had the power to create or cause to grow. Paul's preaching planted the seed when he first arrived in Corinth, and Apollos' work watered it as the congregation grew, but neither had the power to make Christians by their own will. They were only able to use what had been given to them. The real power lay in the word itself.

This does not mean that the work of Paul and Apollos was meaningless, it just means that their work was secondary to the work of the word itself. Each would receive a reward as a faithful worker for God, because they had helped to create and maintain an environment where the word could grow.

10-11

Paul switches metaphors here, changing from a farmer's field to a building. This metaphor allows

him to describe the Corinthians' own role in light of the lessons he has brought out so far. God's work is like a building, which must be built to completion after the foundation has been laid. Paul has only started the work, and they are a part of the ongoing process.

Paul says that the foundation which he has laid is the only one that *can* be laid for this kind of work – Jesus Christ. This is the same concept that he discussed above with the idea of milk and of solid food; it is impossible to reason through the weightier questions of Christianity without first understanding the foundational truths and powers that stand behind the gospel. If we do not trust in God's power, or in the cross of Christ, we do not have the tools we need to carry on His work. The foundation must be laid first, and everything else must be built on top of it.

We need to be aware of that fact because the productive work that we do as Christians builds on that foundation – the things that we teach and develop in our own Christian character. It is important that we build in a way that matches the foundation. It does not make sense to build a shoddy, temporary structure on top of a firm foundation. If we do, our work will vanish when the first great test comes, while the foundation will remain – a memorial to a work left unfinished.

12-15

When we serve productively as God's workers and build on the foundation of His Son, there is a possibility that some of our work will be imperfect. The imperfections may arise from any one of several factors, whether from our inexperience, our naivety, or our ignorance of any part of God's word. This does not disqualify us from God's service, but it does force us to come face-to-face with our own shortcomings and our need for growth.

Everyone who builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ will either produce work of good quality or work of poor quality. At times, we may use gold, silver, and precious stones, but at other times, we may use wood, hay, or straw. All of these things will be tested by fire, and only those that share the same

nature and substance as the foundation will survive. Those who built the parts that perish in the fire will not be cast out as worthless, but they will be forced to recognize the imperfections in their own work and grow beyond them. God will not cast us out because we have yet to grow, but the process of growth will be painful. We will suffer loss, especially when we realize that we have done or taught something wrong among God's people, but God can save us from our weakness.

I do not know what kind of work Paul has in mind in this chapter – whether he is referring to converts brought to God through a Christian's work, or if it is more general than that. In fact, I do not think it matters very much for the point that Paul is making. The emphasis in this passage is on those who work for God, not on the work that they do, and we need to be careful not to make the metaphor say any more than it is designed to. Paul wants to show us what it means to be a faithful, productive worker for God, and sometimes that means being able to recognize the fact that we have failed even while trying to serve Him. Those who do well will receive their reward, but a faithful worker is also willing to face his mistakes and grow by them, no matter how difficult the process is. Serving God is not about immediate perfection, but rather a steady growth toward perfection.

16-17

The story is quite different for someone who intentionally or carelessly corrupts the people of God. Someone who is sincerely trying to be productive in God's work but makes a mistake – even several mistakes – can grow past those imperfections. However, if someone determines to cause harm to God's congregation, the temple where His Spirit dwells, God will destroy him without mercy. No one can fool God, and no one who wishes to harm the faith of God's children can disguise themselves as a sincere worker who simply needs to learn. There is a measurable difference between the two.

18-20

Thus, sincere workers will be patiently taught

and allowed to grow despite their imperfections, while malicious malefactors will be judged and destroyed. We can see clearly in this system that no human wisdom or will can overcome God. We must either accept help from Him, or be opposed by Him. We can judge for ourselves which side we would rather be on. It is better to admit our own foolishness and submit ourselves to learn from God than to insist on our own ability to find a way in this life.

Thus, those who think they are wise are well counseled to become fools. If we think that our work is perfect and that we are uniquely capable of giving God's people what they need, our arrogance needs to be brought back down to earth. We need to humble ourselves. Only then can we learn true wisdom from God. We can only learn after we admit how much we do not know.

Paul quotes from Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 to demonstrate this point. If we think we can fool God by our own craftiness, we will find ourselves caught up in a much cleverer trap of His design, wrought out of our own schemes. We need to learn from Him, not the other way around.

21-23

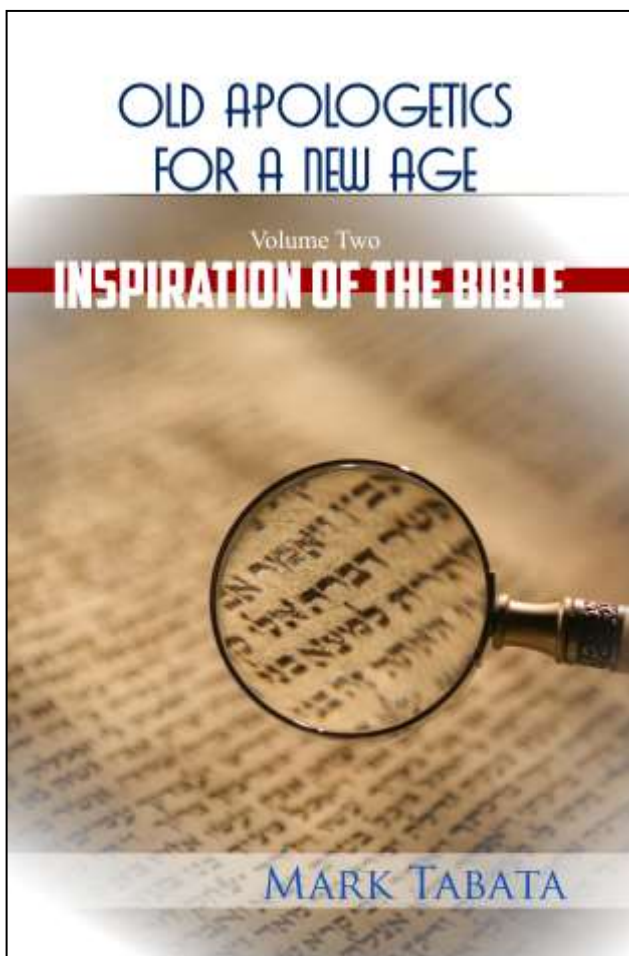
Paul concludes the chapter by reminding us what the point of this whole discussion has been – it will accomplish nothing if we identify ourselves as followers of a human being, even a very capable one. Paul and Apollos had no power to save apart from God, so there was nothing for the Corinthians to boast in by claiming to belong to one or the other. In fact, in God's plan, Paul and Apollos actually belonged to those whom they served. They were servants, not masters.

Likewise, the Corinthians were not their own masters. All things – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things that are, and things that are yet to come – all of this had been given to them for their salvation and their glorification, but they belonged to Christ. They would have nothing if their Master had not given it to them. He, too, would not have His authority if He did not belong to God.

Let us, therefore, become fools so that we can become wise.

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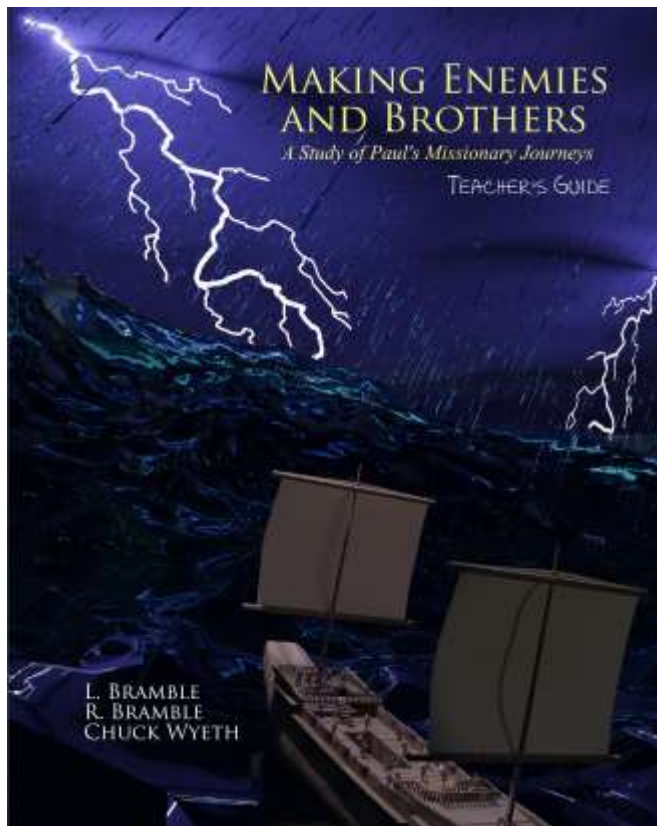
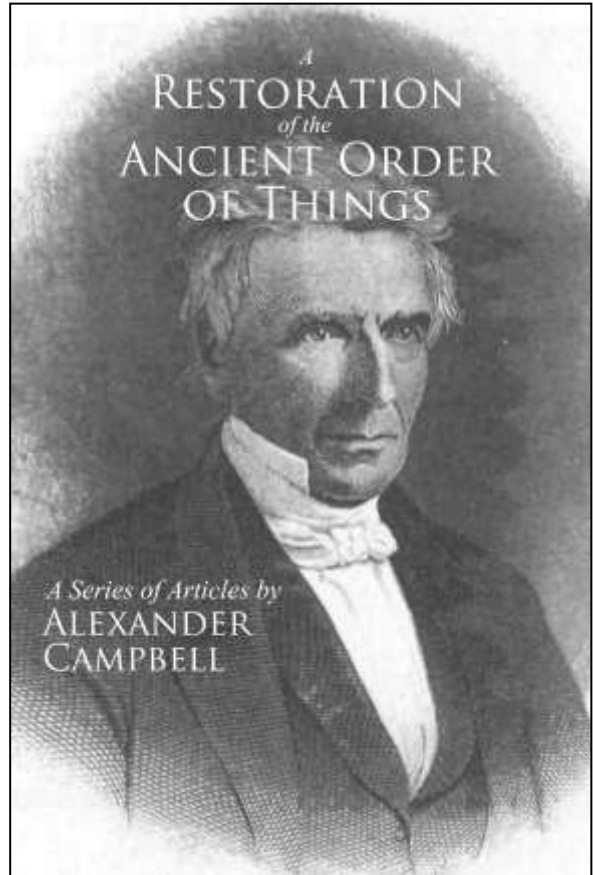
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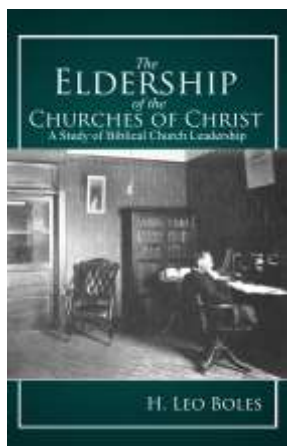
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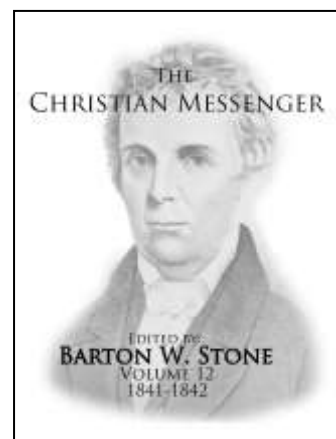
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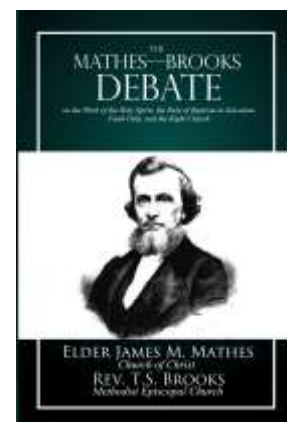
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COMING SOON

We are very excited to give you a sneak-peak of some titles we have planned for 2023.

The Lord was Pleased to Crush Him: A Study of Isaiah 53 (by Bradley S. Cobb). A commentary on what may be the greatest chapter of prophecy in the Old Testament. (note: title may be subject to change)

The Autobiography of Elias Smith: Critical Edition. This will be the definitive edition of this early Restoration pioneer's life story, including some portions which have never been included in the different editions (1816 and 1840).

Lard's Quarterly (volumes 3-5). Completing the collection of this monumental Restoration Movement journal!

The Stevens-Beever Debate on Catholicism. This classic debate has been praised for its clarity and usefulness in battling the false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Heretic Detector (Volumes 2-3). This will be the first time these volumes have seen print in nearly 190 years!

Moses E. Lard's Commentary on Romans. The most popular commentary on Paul's letter to Rome ever to be published by a member of the church of Christ!

Considering Jesus: A Commentary on Hebrews. Andrew D. Erwin (editor of *the Gospel Gleaner*) offers a brand-new commentary on this amazing book of God's word!

J.W. McGarvey's Commentary on Galatians through Thessalonians. Probably McGarvey's least-known commentary, but still a great work!

And there will be many, many more!

OUR GREATEST HOPE

Danny E. Davis

“One thing I have desired of the LORD, that I will seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.”

(Psalm 27:4)

When we focus on physical things and not spiritual things, life becomes hard. Have you ever felt hopeless? Have you ever felt tired and beaten down to the point where you were exhausted? Exhausted to the point that you were prostrate before the LORD, and you had no words? So, you wept and you bowed before the LORD and you prayed without saying a word as tears continuously streamed down your face. It is during those times you know the Holy Spirit is groaning on your behalf to a holy God, begging for His mercy and some reprieve from your sufferings.¹ We have hope in Christ during times of physical suffering, but sometimes it is still hard in this life, isn't it. Why is it hard?

¹ Romans 8:26

When we focus on spiritual things, we can see the sin around us through a lens as we interact with others in everyday life. There is so much unrighteousness, injustice, pain, suffering, and trouble. Sin that the evil one introduced to Adam and Eve. At times it can be overwhelming if we walk by sight and not by faith,² which is contrary to the Scriptures. These sinful things are also contrary to the character of our God, and they must be contrary to who we are as God's people. It hurts when people sin against us and around us, doesn't it.

When we focus on physical things, life is exhausting. The writer of Ecclesiastes explains the meaninglessness of life apart from God throughout 12 chapters inspired by the Holy Spirit. And he (believed to be Solomon) sums up the tragedy of living life as a “burdensome task” when he explains:

“And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom, concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to

² 2 Corinthians 5:7

the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.”³

One way to examine the book of Ecclesiastes is by comparing the writer’s focus on physical things versus spiritual things. We must remember that God blesses us with physical things through Christ Jesus, our Lord. But as God’s children our spiritual blessings in Christ are much greater than our temporary, physical blessings. Don’t let the world get you down. Don’t focus on physical things; focus on spiritual things. Set your mind on things above.⁴

The next time you feel down and are troubled, remember to focus on your spiritual blessings. And then consider: what would you maintain is our greatest hope—our greatest blessing—in Christ?

Is a home in heaven our greatest hope? Is eternal life our greatest hope? Those hopeful blessings are too prestigious to rank, but perhaps there is an even greater hope—an even greater blessing—in Christ

³ Ecclesiastes 1:13

⁴ Colossians 3:2

Jesus.

I long to see God and behold Him in His beauty, just like the Psalmist David.⁵ I long to see Jesus and see Him as He is, for we shall be like Him.⁶ I long to lean on our dear Savior’s breast just like His servant John.⁷

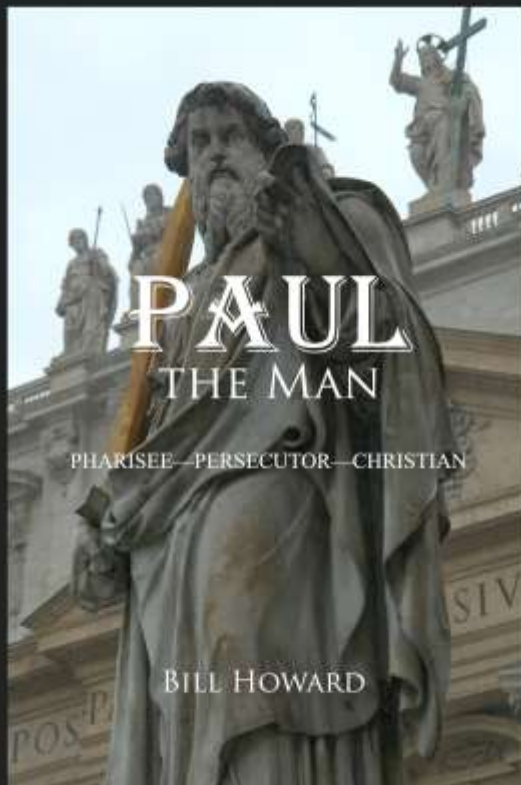
Are you to the point in your faith that you long to see God in His beauty, to dwell in His house and to inquire in His temple all your days? If that is not your desire, perhaps you are focused on physical things. Focus on spiritual things, grow in your faith, and make it your desire. To behold the majesty and glory of a holy, holy, holy God is arguably the greatest hope in our lives—and Jesus, our Lord, has made that possible.

Consider this spiritual blessing—perhaps our greatest hope—the next time the world tries to bring you down!

⁵ Psalm 27:4

⁶ 1 John 3:2

⁷ John 13:25 and 21:20



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CHRISTIAN CINEMATOGRAPHY

John Krivak



I've heard, when the house lights come on after an opera, that you will catch old Italian men weeping. Now, some may say grown men should better control their emotions. Others might say an opera is a very silly trigger for getting all emotional. Against all such criticism, I am deeply moved by several of the arts—music, poetry, even paintings and photography (but not opera). And cinema—when directed to portray Biblical themes—powerfully engages and stirs my heart and mind.

Some might remain stoically impervious to such emotional appeal. Still, the power of the arts can have high universal appeal over us. When *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* came to the screen in 1982, I saw it in Japan. When the lights went down as the film began to work its magic, the theater was filled with the noisy cellophane bags of popcorn being opened. When the lights came on after the closing credits, there was not a dry eye in the house!

Of course, we should guard our emotions against the big “ism.” If we let our feelings get swept away, the guards of our intellects may be overpowered and knocked aside. With emotions afire, we are much more vulnerable to accept new ideas or to change our thinking. The arts have this power. The ancient Greeks credited the invention of music to the muses—those mischievous manipulators of the affections. All works of art (even more serious forms, such as the documentary) are wooing the audience for a “buy in.” After viewing, you will believe that captive killer whales are being mistreated and exploited. Or, you will not. With fiction also, you are worked over—by skilled craft—to believe what you see is true. *Avatar* creates a whole new world; you

experience breathing a new atmosphere and feel the pull of different gravity. Or, you refuse to buy in, and declare your opinion that the movie was “unrealistic.” You simply aren’t buying it—it’s just emotionalism. This is how cinema works.

The power of cinema has been applied to Christian themes. Like many genres, a common criticism is that the plots are too predictable. There are usually no surprises in the strict code of morality, nor in the clear identification of heroes or villains. Even so, I love a “preachy” movie, as a bit of counterbalance to Hollywood productions (which also are quite predictable in a different way). Two themes are often featured in Christian cinema: “overcomer” and “apologetic triumph.” The first depicts someone facing an unimaginably difficult challenge or hardship, yet in the end there is a triumph that only God makes possible. It is nearly always true that the best movies are “based on a true story.” The second theme pits believers against unbelievers, in a contest between worldviews that either include or exclude God. It’s superstitious Christianity (a fairytale) against Christianity as a successful truth-claim. By the time the final credits roll, viewers can be assured that God’s not dead. I have enjoyed many such movies.

I do have a pet peeve, however. Many Christian films are produced by evangelicals whose theology derives from the Protestant Reformation of the early 1500’s. It is plainly observable that an unusually high percentage of Christian conversion scenes feature a “death-bed conversion.” Someone emerges barely alive and is offered one last chance to connect with God. Why? It seems that such abnormal

circumstances favor evangelical doctrine (that does not require baptism)! This corresponds to the “thief on the cross” who—without baptism—is admitted into Paradise by Jesus. And, of course, the moviegoers predominantly are evangelicals who claim conversion without baptism—even though they were not on death-beds at the time! This is a cheap way to dodge Bible teaching on baptism in Christian conversion, and the emotional appeal does not win over a Restorationist like me.

I would like to offer a brief review of three productions that show the potential of Christian cinematography. These are my top three picks.

The Chosen

This is a masterful dramatization of Jesus and the Twelve. Although based on the four Gospels, there is much embellishment (and the producers openly admit this with nothing to hide). This is unavoidable, because the Bible offers insufficient material to satisfy an audience. This is no criticism of the Bible, since the Gospels were not written as movie scripts. Characters are not sufficiently developed to become relatable, so imagination necessarily fills in the gaps. Matthew the tax collector becomes a likeable man on the autism spectrum. Of course, even though pure conjecture, this is very astute—autistic persons tend to have astonishing skills at processing information (but struggle with processing relationships). This communicates to a modern audience that Jesus relates even to our flawed natures (and this is true to Scripture). Also, the Gospels move from one extraordinary event to another, but say little about day-to-day realities. In *The Chosen*, daily Jewish life under Roman imperialism is very believably portrayed, but only careful embellishment makes it happen.

So, as we watch, we must process both “black & white” (true info from Scripture) and “gray” (unsupported embellishment). And the question is whether the total package distorts the true Jesus, or not? A great test case is the way *The Chosen* depicts the apostle, James the son of Alphaeus (“Little James” on the show). He is presented with partial

lameness that Jesus—for some reason—never heals. In fact, he heals others by Jesus’ power, but remains a bit hobbled. Jesus explains that James has great opportunity to glorify God as is, and that he will be richly rewarded at the end for his suffering. The director shared a viewer response that came after watching this episode. A young woman’s health went from great to debilitating. None of the several treatments helped, and she cried to God for healing. When she saw the Little James episode, it really spoke to her because she also went unhealed. Of course, this characterization of James is not part of Scripture! However, it powerfully communicates the truth of Scripture.

Some understand the healing miracles of Jesus to indicate what potentially (conditioned on faith) is available to every follower—right now. I have Parkinson’s disease and was challenged by another Christian to ask God for healing, and to develop the faith that He would surely consent. To expect less, she said, would demonstrate a troubling lack of faith. I do not share this theology. I understand Gospel healings as “signs” that point to total health when Jesus returns. The few He has already healed demonstrate, for all of us, that Jesus has such power and authority. Yet the plain fact is, many of us get sick (and die). We are living between the “already” and the “not yet.” The Kingdom is here and Jesus has the throne, but we are to wait patiently (Greek, *hupomonā*) for God to finalize matters. He could protect us all from harm, but does not. So even within the gray embellishment, *The Chosen* nailed it. And I have found reliability all the way through (with minor quibbles).

“*Did you get shivers while watching that?*” Frequently, viewers are emotionally triggered, simultaneously. And, there is a particular flavor of humor to be heard while reading the Gospels, and this series catches it skillfully and often. Biblical allusions and references are sometimes slipped in so subtly that only the alert and studied will catch them. High praises for *The Chosen*!

The Passion of the Christ

Oh my! It was like a stun grenade had exploded in the theater. The movie had ended and the lights came on. But no one moved and no one spoke. No one could move, and none could speak! The intensity of this cinematic depiction of the Crucifixion had pressed us, one and all, hard into our chairs. We felt the weight of what Jesus endured and—if only in cinematic experience—we shared that with the Son of God. The Gospel accounts are so stark and direct, while this movie expansively showed what it must have been like. You cannot help but sense the reluctance of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They will not allow their Gospel readers to experience the actual graphic gore and horror.¹ The writing technique forces Jesus to bear the Cross in the most privately personal way. Readers—each to varying extents—must use their imaginations to read between the scant lines to try to understand what He suffered. *The Passion* ruthlessly exploits this hush around the Cross.

How much of it was true to the Gospels, or true to other historical sources on ancient crucifixion practices? Much, without a doubt. But again, how much was embellishment? After all, among Mel Gibson movies, horribly bloody scenes are not rare! The actual number of lashings when Jesus was scourged—too many, or too few? No one of us knows. Yet I had to come away, sure that I now knew what Jesus went through, better than ever before. Critics panned that viewers are forced to relate cinematically to a one-eyed Jesus, from very early into the long film. But we—who are believers in Jesus—always see Him wounded, a terribly scarred Lamb (yet now raised and exalted).

¹ The original readers of the Gospels did not have to wonder what horrors and abuses were bound up in crucifixion. The Roman executioners made sure, by presenting their crosses as a very public spectacle, that everyone knew exactly what the condemned would experience. Polite society avoided discussing these horrors, just as did our Gospel writers.

Don't know why, but it is hard for me to revisit this one. Maybe it's too painful to revisit His pain. Gibson gave in to pressure to remove the line, "*His blood shall be on us and on our children!*" (Matthew 27:25, NASB) from the lips of the crowd advocating for Barabbas. The worry was for blaming the Jews. However, no audience can escape the brutal causation, from the sins of each of us, that drove Jesus to the Cross. That—yes, that—makes it really hard to make myself watch it over again. Sometimes, around the season when our culture contemplates the Cross for Easter, I will (honestly, force myself to) watch. It refreshes my spirit, yet through a most disturbing process.

The Passion ends with a single waterdrop, as though it were the teardrop of God, forming up high (in Heaven) and falling to the earth where the corpse of Jesus is suspended on the Cross. The drop hits with explosive power, foreshadowing the Resurrection. And ever since, there have been hopeful promises that Mel Gibson will follow-up with a sequel that features the Resurrection. This has great potential, and some have claimed that it will be the greatest movie in history. Maybe. I just hope it does not depict Jesus, during the few days in the tomb, visiting Hell and freeing its prisoners. The "harrowing of Hell" that some believe in, as I see it, wrongly interprets the Scriptures. Christian cinema is vulnerable to erroneous errors in doctrine and theology. Viewer beware!

Again, embellishment drives the cinematic production of this unspeakably powerful and realistic experience of the Cross. Yet I can find nowhere a departure from what is written, either in the Gospels or in the historical sources that inform about the ancient practice of Roman crucifixion.

The Shack

I have defended the use of careful embellishment, and *The Shack* will take us to the absolute limit, and perhaps past. Here, you encounter a black woman who wants to be called "Papa"—and is God

the Father. But later, “Papa” morphs into a Native American man.² The character of Jesus also appears, wearing a predictable characterization—nothing unusual. But the Holy Spirit becomes “Sarayu” (a word from India meaning “a surprisingly refreshing wind”) who is portrayed as a young oriental woman. Before calling blasphemy and running away, consider a few things.

First, some accommodation is always required to portray God³ in a movie (once it was a cigar-smoking George Burns in the comedy, *Oh God!*). Moreover, this movie needs Father, Son, and Spirit to help the lead character (Mac) process a tragedy so deep that it must be called “the great sorrow.” The human characters portraying God are essentially cinematic metaphors, each of which approaches some realization of what God is. And in fact, God is shown in the Bible wearing attributes or taking actions which, alternately, are distinctly masculine or feminine. So, God the Father is like a black woman or like a Native American man, sort of in the same way that the Kingdom is like a mustard seed. Think metaphor—carrying it only far enough to make its point (without a totality transfer). The claim is not that God “is” an ethnic person, but that (in some significant way that is important only to this movie)

² The creation of humanity in the image of God prevents restricting any particular gender or any particular race to a special or privileged likeness. All have an equal claim. This review—by drawing attention to the particular racial or gender characterization of God—claims neither any inferiority nor any superiority. Rather, the morph from one form (of both gender and race) to another conveys, in cinematic terms, this essential equality. And yet, by insisting that the rather fluid character is always designated as “Papa”, God is throughout allowed to reveal himself as the Father. The shocking cinematography, in the end, is remarkably true in its theology.

³ The second commandment in the Decalogue forbids making any image of God. The image of any created thing, whether because of its corruption, or because of the inadequacy to fully capture the greatness of all that God is, can become an idol. Viewers (of movies that portray God as a character) are reasonably capable of understanding that the character is not actually God, but merely an artistic accommodation that conveys some limited truth about God.

God “is like” that. Second, God is presented—at first—as a woman who is the Divine parent (“Papa”) because Mac would have struggled to relate to a Divine father (because his own father had abused him in childhood). Out of love, God appears here more like a mother. God adapts himself differently to different people.

Mac struggles to overcome his deep hurt, and it takes Father, Son, and Spirit to overcome his anger at God. Anger at God is common to victims of great suffering. *The Shack* vindicates God’s loving compassion when we may have come to doubt it. This is the great value of the movie. However, theology does break down at some point. Mac is able to encounter his evil father (after the father had died). They reconcile and sins are forgiven. In the interim, did his father undergo a conversion to Christianity? I can only make this work on that assumption. Or, does this suggest universalism? Regrettably, interviews with the author (Paul Young) confirm this wrong theology.

However, I can still watch with profit if I force the movie through a true theological grid. I need not become a universalist! Under my own experience of great sorrow and pain, I also may demand an answer: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Is God punishing me? Have I fallen from His favor? Either God caused this, or He did nothing to prevent it! We all wonder such thoughts, or even shout them angrily at Heaven. *The Shack* helps us to process this tendency by showing something of God that is not easily grasped—except inside a shack where the true heart of Father, Son, and Spirit can triumph over a damaged heart. Two thumbs way up!

Finally...

Christian cinema is a powerful force. Like books (and even sermons) produced by people, care must be taken to listen carefully and to sift out falsehood (“eat the fish, but spit out the bones!”). These three productions strike me as astonishingly good. The acting and production quality is first-rate. My reach for authentic Biblical spirituality has been beautifully enhanced by each of them.

JESUS CHRIST

the Resurrection and the Life

Gerald Cowan



Jesus did not preach a “funeral sermon” for anyone, but his words “*I AM the Resurrection and the Life*” (John 11:25-26) are used frequently in funeral sermons for professing Christians. In this I AM statement Jesus identified himself with the Father who gives resurrection and life. Several times he stated and demonstrated his power to bring the dead to life again. He raised some dead ones to life again, and healed some sick who would have died otherwise. Examples: He raised The daughter of Jairus, a synagogue official (Luke 8:41, Mt. 9:18-25) and the son of a widow in Nain (Luke 7:11-15). Perhaps most notable was His resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany after four days of certified death (John 11:1-44). It was on this occasion that he claimed to be the resurrection and the life. Earlier he had stated: “*As my Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it*” (John 5:21). At the final general resurrection it is the voice of Christ that will call all the dead to come out of the graves (John 5:28-29). In another of his *I AM* statements Jesus claimed to be the spiritual bread of life, the bread of heaven who gives life to or in the world (John 6:33-35).

Jesus Gives a Special Kind of Life in the Present World (John 6:33)

Spiritual life, not just the restoration of physical life to the dead. New life is a new relationship with

God (Romans 6:4—new life; Ephesians. 4:23-24—new man. Spiritual life is the *true life*—life that is life indeed, awareness and appreciation for one’s own soul and self, one’s spirit. He promises and gives abundant life (John 10:10): life in greater quantity, greater quality, improved prospects, greater enjoyment, greater appreciation and purpose, better relationship with God and with others, better relationship with oneself. It is eternal life in promise, prospect, and hope (John 10:28, 1 John 2:25, Titus 3:7). It is not merely eternal existence. Everybody, good and bad, will have that. Even hell, everlasting punishment, is eternal existence. *Life* here is meant as eternal connection and positive relationship with God.

Jesus is not just one who can give life, ***He is life***. “*In him was life; the life was the light of men*” (John 1:4). Remember he also said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life – no one can come to the Father except by me*” (John 14:6). He gives life to whom he will (John 5:21). “[T]o as many as received him to them he gave power (authorization and ability) to become children of God” (John 1:12). Jesus is the one in whom God and man come together. He himself was perfect man and perfect God was in him – so in that sense he was both fully human and divine. To be in him is to be alive and in God. “*Because I live, you shall live also. I am in the Father and you are in me and I am in you*” (John

14:19-20). “*If any one be in Christ he is a new creation*” – the old man is gone and the new man has taken his place, in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The life he speaks of is spiritual, an intimate relationship and connection with God (Ephesians. 2:1-4).

The Reality of the Death of Jesus, and the Spiritual Death of Man

Spiritual life is not a given, not an unconditional gift of God. Nobody is exempt from physical death. Even Jesus’ best friends and disciples experienced hardship, sickness and death! Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus about Lazarus being very sick. Being best friends with Jesus did not exempt them from tragedy and pain—and death. You may want, if you have not already done so, to read the eleventh chapter of John’s gospel. It is almost unsettling to read here that when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick and in trouble, he deliberately stayed away, making sure of Lazarus’ death (11:5-6, 21, 32). In our lives we may have wondered why God permitted such terrible things to happen. God’s ways are not always our ways, but His ways are always good in the end. God works for good with all who love Him and are among those who abide in His calling (Romans 8:28 RSV). We cannot always judge the goodness of God by today’s experiences or by our own understanding and wishes. Christ had a plan for Lazarus and for his sisters. Sickness, pain, and death are not the final word for those who love Christ. Christ had a wonderful surprise for them, and has an even greater one for us. Not even the disciples understood Jesus at this point. They misunderstood Jesus’ words that Lazarus had “fallen asleep.” Jesus finally had to spell it out to them, “*Lazarus is dead.*” The purpose in letting Lazarus die was to demonstrate God’s and Christ’s power over death, and since Jesus knew it was only a very short time before His own death it was important for all of them to know.

Death is real and it should be expected by everybody.

It will come to all eventually, ready or not. Hebrews 9:27 does not pertain to ordinary persons. In

context it is the pronouncement that Christ would not have to suffer and die again: his one death was sufficient for God’s purpose. Every person who lives will die physically, and most will die spiritually. In the case of physical death we may say, “While there is life there is hope.” But for most there is no hope in death or after the death of the body. Even in the face of physical death there is hope if the power of God is believed and accepted. Every person who sins will die spiritually, separated from God, out of fellowship with Him and rejected by Him (Ephesians 2:1-4, Isaiah. 59:1-2). Remember, only those who are faithful in Christ can go with him to the heaven of God which he is preparing for his redeemed people (John 14:1-3).

Jesus conquered death for those he raised.

The raising of Lazarus is the best example of his power over death (11:38-43). He asks those standing by to remove the stone barrier, to open up the tomb, to face the reality of death. I have a few pertinent poems which will be appended to this essay.

Martha, the practical one, remarks on the impracticality of raising Lazarus to life again; Lazarus has been dead four day and the stench of his decaying body would be problematic for Jesus. But Jesus reminded her and others standing by that through faith in God many seemingly impossible things may be possible, and that they should roll the stone away.

In addressing God he speaks his prayer openly and audibly, not for show and not to glorify himself. It was done so that they would believe in God and His power which was to be demonstrated. Jesus simply speaks forth a command to that one person, Lazarus, to come forth. The power of Jesus’ word alone brought life, because he himself is LIFE. No power on earth or in hell could have prevented what happened next. The very **Resurrection and Life** himself had spoken. This was intended to inspire and strengthen faith in the disciples and others who witnessed it. It would sustain them through the events of the coming days and weeks, when Jesus himself was dead and buried, but would come to life again after three days and be among them for another

er few weeks. It was a temporary return to life for Lazarus, as for all others raised from the dead. He would die again.

The resurrection of Jesus is a source of ongoing faith in Jesus for us, because he was raised never to die again (John 11:45, Hebrews 7:25). Death is never final for the one who believes and accepts Jesus as the life; the way, the truth and the life; the resurrection and the life. Jesus said, *“One who believes in me, though he dies yet shall he live. The one who believes in me shall never die”* (John 11: 25b, 26). He does not mean that the believer would not experience physical death. All will die (or be changed out of the physical body. Even one who dies physically can be alive spiritually (1 Peter 4:6, Ephesians 2:1-4). One who believes – puts his obedient faith and trust in Jesus – will not die spiritually. Even those who die in Christ physically will be raised to life again spiritually.

The Resurrection

His own resurrection is the proof of his power to raise others. If he had not been raised, our faith would be severely hampered. Our belief in him would be missing some vital supportive evidence. But his resurrection from the dead proved he was the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). Our belief in our own resurrection would not be properly or fully supported – our faith would be vain, empty, unrealistic (1 Corinthians 15:11-20). We believe that Jesus can do for us what he promised because of what God in him did for him (John 10:17-18, Romans 6:4-5 and 8:9-10).

The general resurrection will be the ultimate proof of the Lord’s power over death, and over Satan’s power of death. Satan’s power is stated, though not defined, in Hebrews 2:14. He brought physical death for humans into the world by successfully tempting and persuading Eve and Adam to eat what God had forbidden to them, and they became mortal, subject to physical death. They and all humans who came from them are subject to and afraid of physical death (the mortality or death rate for humans is predictably and eventually 100 percent;

Romans 5:11-14). At the time of their sin Adam and Eve died spiritually, separated from God. Every person becomes spiritually dead when he himself sins (Ephesians. 2:1-4). Jesus has power – his own resurrection proves it – to overthrow all the works of the devil, both physical and spiritual death (1 John 3:8, and 1 Corinthians 15:22).

Not everybody is willing to believe in the resurrection promised by Jesus, but they try to control the outcome for themselves, apart from Christ. It is an exercise in futility. Some want extended life in the body – hopefully resuscitation to life after the death of the body, on their own terms, of course. Cryogenics has given many a false hope. A number of deceased people have been frozen in hopes of someday being brought back to life, in effect recreating life in the dead, a resurrection which will make possible preserving old memories and consciousness in new bodies. The price for the process plus preservation currently ranges from 30,000 to 200,000 US dollars. A few thousand people have reportedly signed up and paid for cryogenic service and many more are on the waiting list. Is it futile? Time will tell. Many disavow belief in God or in resurrection by Christ, but they live “in hope” that science will provide what God can’t or, more likely they hope nobody has any future existence at all after the death of the body. Some take extreme measures, such as complete dissolution of the body so that there will be nothing to be raised from death, whether by Christ or by human science and technology. Both the efforts to preserve oneself and to eliminate oneself are a pointless waste of effort and money. It is the spirit (eternal and indestructible) not the physical body that will be raised in or as a new spirit body (read 1 Corinthians, chapter 15). A preserved body is worthless. The spirit that was in it doesn’t need the old body to be raised in. The body that has returned to the dust of the ground has no bearing at all upon the existence and disposition of the spirit. Not only does Jesus have power to carry out the resurrection, ***he is the resurrection***. He is the effective principle and instrument of the resurrection.

Eternal Life in Heaven

Remember that life and death in the spiritual sense have to do with one's relationship to God, not to the mere fact of existence. Spiritual death is separation from God, not accepted by Him, not in fellowship with Him, rejected by Him and consigned to hell if the condition is not rectified. The "second death" – eternal death – is hell (Revelation 20:14, 21:8). Spiritual life is acceptance by God, in fellowship with God. The "first resurrection" (critical and all-important) is the point at which the ultimate and irrevocable relationship is formed, when spiritual life is no longer conditional and cannot be lost, when the "second death" has no further power. Only then is it eternal *life* – all else is eternal *death* (Revelation 20:5).

Jesus defined eternal life quite poignantly in John 17:3 *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* Knowledge or experience of God or belief in Christ does not constitute eternal life. To know God by experience, to know Jesus Christ by experience in one's life and to know God through him is the key to eternal life. If experiential knowledge of Jesus as the Lord and Savior indwelling the person is maintained until death, it becomes the passage from death to eternal life (Revelation 2:10).

Eternal death is self-conscious, self-aware existence in hell, the "second death," with the devil and all his servants and followers (Revelation 20:10-14).

The greatest comfort we can give each other is to share the good news about life in Christ, the resurrection to glory, and the life eternal which follows it for the obedient believers in Christ. Those who have received strength and comfort from God to get them through some trial or hardship, or through the struggle to stay faithful to God and not be overcome, are able to comfort others – share with others the comfort they have received and help them keep faith with the Lord (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Christians in Thessalonica were concerned about those who had died, and about the probability that they too

would die before Christ returns. What then? Would they lose everything in death? (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The hope of the Christian is that the living Jesus will return for his people, both those who had died and those who were still alive at his coming. Paul reassured them that those who have died in Christ are safe with him, in death and in the resurrection. The still-living Jesus will come again for his people. Before anybody goes to heaven with Jesus all the dead will be raised as spirit beings and those still alive when he comes will be changed into spirit beings too. Then all the saved will rise together to meet the Christ when he comes and, finally, all the saved will be with the Lord in his heaven forever.

Conclusion:

The resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension to glory at the right hand of God's throne in heaven is historical fact. But it is more than that. Because he is risen and living, we are able to have a relationship with Him. Because he is risen and living, he is able to touch our lives. Because he is risen and living, we are confident that he will raise us up too. When Jesus said to Martha, and now says to us, *"I am the Resurrection and the Life,"* it is not a little theological conundrum or puzzle and not a mystery, but rather a challenge. He can say, "Do you believe me, when I make this claim? Do you want the life that I am offering?" The question I am asking you now, in the name of Christ, is this: "Do you want to have that abundant life that Jesus offers?" (John 10:10). Man's greatest enemy, death, is defeated by man's greatest friend, Christ Jesus. Jesus is the life. Death cannot conquer him. He will eventually and eternally conquer death. Death cannot abide in the presence of Christ. He is the resurrection and the life, so all who abide in Him will never die away from God.

Is the life of Christ in you? All will be raised. Nobody can avoid it. The faithful will be raised to eternal life with God in heaven. All the unfaithful and unsaved, all who reject or fail to follow the Lord will be raised to the second death, eternal death.

THE SAVIOR AND HIS CROSS AND ME

With my mind's eye I view the cross
On which my Savior Jesus died,
That bloody instrument of death
Where Christ the man was crucified.
One time, for sin, forever.

In countless years of time before,
Man's sin and guilt were multiplied.
Christ took the debt upon himself,
To man's sin-debt his gift applied.
Redeemed by grace, forever.

I hear the anguish in his voice
When to the Father, God, he cried,
"It's done." The price has now been paid.
His sacrifice is justified.
To be repeated? Never.

No body hangs upon that cross,
In death the Lord did not abide.
Both cross and grave are empty now,
As empty as is human pride.
Empty, now and forever.

Not merely to the world of men,
To me the sacrifice applied.
What others do or fail to do,
His gift to me is not denied.
Sacred to me, forever.

Jesus, in your cross I would hide,
On it with you be crucified
And in it set all else aside
That in your love I may abide
In heav'n with you, forever.

- Gerald Cowan

RAISING THE DEAD

He did not say bring out the dead,
"Lazarus come forth," the Savior said.
And had he not thus specified
All the dead would have complied.

One day he will give that command,
And from the earth, the sea and land
The dead from all time past will come.
No longer blind or deaf or dumb,

Each then will speak in his own voice,
Admit and verify his choice
Of how, in what way he would live
And what of self to God he'd give.

Each then will hear Lord Jesus say,
"Come with me now," or "Go away."
"With or without me you will be,
Both now and in eternity."

- Gerald Cowan



LIGHTS FOR THE LORD

Holes in the darkness we would be
O Lord of light, O Lord of love.
The light and love that come from Thee
Who brought it to us from above,
Who opened up our eyes to see
And opened up our hearts to love.

Curtains of ignorance and doubt
Hide from our eyes, hide from our hearts
The Lord we willingly shut out.
The Lord from whom we stand apart
And whom we cannot live without,
Now threatens from us to depart.

Out of the dark abyss of hate
Can we still climb? We try to crawl,
But selfishness does not abate,
Self pleasing sin has caused our fall.
Have our eyes opened Lord too late?
Is there a way to save us all?

Dressed in God's armor we can find
Salvation and security.
Protected body, soul, and mind
In Christ we have immunity.
Our ever watchful Lord will bind
All threats that soil our purity.

We would punch holes of living hope
Into the darkness of despair
When we with troubles cannot cope,
Life seems destroyed beyond repair
And victory exceeds our scope,
Punch holes of our God's loving care.

Holes in the darkness. Lord we yearn
To be in Christ, to be Christ-filled,
To overflow with what we learn,
With Him His cause on earth to build,
By overcoming with Him earn
The heav'n that for us He has willed.

- Gerald Cowan

ENTERTAINING *Angels*

John Krivak

“Better luck next time!” So read the line at the bottom of the thank-you card. During my first ministry, I received a call from a brother in Christ. He needed a place to stay and was short on funds. Could he stay with us, he asked? His travels would take him to financial supporters or would-be supporters of his ministry. That was back in the 1980’s, and I remember an evening pleasantly discussing our lives and ministries for Jesus. And we prayed. We met as strangers, but found that we shared much in common. He left after breakfast, and only then we found the card that he left in his room. It read:

Dear John and Becky,

By doing what you have done for me, some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2).

Then down at the bottom: *“Better luck next time!”* I love that!

Hebrews 13:2 and Christian Hospitality

This is exhortation, or paraenesis. The writer of Hebrews¹ wrote to promote Christian hospitality:

¹ My best guess is that Hebrews was written by Silvanus (aka Silas). He was privileged with close acquaintance both to Peter (1 Peter 5:12) and to Paul (Acts 15-17; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Hebrews exhibits themes and vocab-

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2, NASB). By “strangers,” travelling Christian messengers is the probable meaning. In earliest Christianity, churches communicated to each other through messengers who often carried letters, or epistles. Only hospitality made this possible. Jesus sent disciples on ministry journeys that depended on the hospitality of strangers (for example, see Luke 10:1-16). Paul’s travels on “missionary journeys” (detailed in Acts) depended on churches providing hospitality (and finance) as he moved about the Roman Empire. In 2 John 9-10, the wicked Diotrephes blocked such messengers from receiving needed hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9 encourages a different hospitality—not strictly to messengers, but “to one another”—that is, among church members in congregational fellowship. This fulfills a

ulary that are both Petrine and Pauline. This explains why the letter sounds like Paul (though it is written in better Greek than we often find in Paul’s epistles). Also, while the author of Hebrews claims to have received the message of salvation from other people (2:3), Paul insisted that his gospel was received directly from Jesus and not from any human source (Gal. 1:11-12).

spiritual function where “grace gifts” may be shared in ministry among Christians.

Within Hebrews, the careful structure of the writing continues through the 12th chapter. Then, chapter 13 appears as a less formal, more personal address between the author and friends. Like the early and main section, once again the Old Testament is brought in to undergird this section of writing with authority.

Entertained Angels in O.T. Scripture

The exhortation in Hebrews is intriguing. The guest invited to share your home might be human (like an apostle) or might be superhuman (like an angel). And, the host may not realize which kind of guest he was entertaining! You may be unable to distinguish between them by their appearance. This notion is drawn from O.T. texts such as Judges 6:11ff., 13:1ff., and especially Genesis 18:1 through 19:1. In their appearance, angels usually are easily distinguished from humans. They are God’s warriors, and those who catch a glimpse are terrified. However, in these unusual texts, angels appear so human that they are extended regular hospitality. If this is documented in O.T. Scripture, then it just might happen to Christians like us!

The allusion in Hebrews is probably to be connected with the experience of Abraham (Genesis 18). There, we find that not only angels—but that also God (Yahweh, the LORD)—all appear in such a human form, that they are offered both a foot-washing and a special meal. God had appeared to Abraham twice before, and has joined into covenant with him. Then here, God appears again (and repeats covenant promises for a boy-child as heir), but this time Abraham sees three men. By 19:1, two of them are identified as angels. The other is God/Yahweh!² Although the writer of Hebrews doesn’t

go there, it seems therefore possible that those who show hospitality may entertain not only angels—the guest under their roof might be God! Well, maybe not. If this angel-guest of Abraham actually is Jesus (see footnote), we should not expect to see Him again until one final return (Hebrews 9:28; 10:10-13).

Serendipity in our Hospitality?

Christian paraenesis is often presented in a way that is especially appealing—as a true serendipity. Sometimes, we are not pushed toward expected obedience by jabs from a harsh command, nor because we are outranked by higher authority, nor because we face repercussions and the threat of punishment. *Do it, or else! Do it, because I said so! Do it—this is a commandment, not a suggestion!* I know, sometimes we face that kind of pressure to do what we ought (truth be told, sometimes we need it). But not always!

Jesus could have laid down an ultimatum; He had every right to crack the whip. But as He prepared to take the reins of authority (that, only after the Cross, were to be His), Jesus spoke like this:

You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14–15).

Sometimes the offer of a carrot works better motivation than the threat from a stick.

The obligation in Hebrews—to show hospitality—is not driven by the force of imperative or oughtness. We aren’t made to face shame if we should disobey. No, something quite different compels us here—if we disregard God’s exhortation, we might pass by the opportunity of a lifetime! We might have entertained angels unawares!

² Perhaps the best explanation is that God appears as the third angel, and so we have an instance of a pre-incarnational Christophany. That is, a special angel appears in O.T. texts who acts and speaks as though He is God. He is usually called “the

angel of the LORD.” Is this angel none other than Jesus, making O.T. appearances before His birth in Bethlehem?

Angels at my House!

We had a houseful over for lunch after church. Saul, a Christian brother, is a professional chef who forages for wild food, like mushrooms—he's a real fungi (pronounced "fun guy"). He and Becky work magic in the kitchen, while shooting barbs of playful insults at each other and having way too much fun. Once, pan-fried steak got so smoky that visibility in the house was just 2.5 feet. Meanwhile, I stay out of their way and look to the needs of guests—helping all to feel welcome and comfortable. I tell the children that I need help feeding the aquarium fish. This is one of those meals to which the whole church has been invited! You never know who all will show, and even though our congregation is small, our house can fill to the limit.

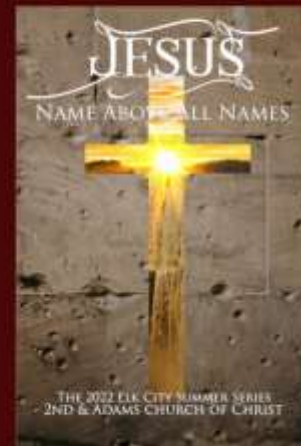
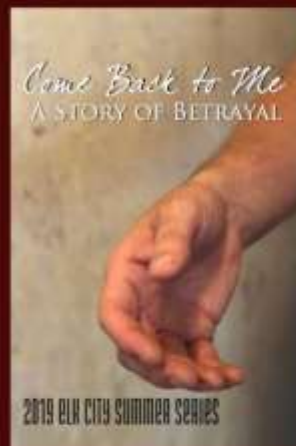
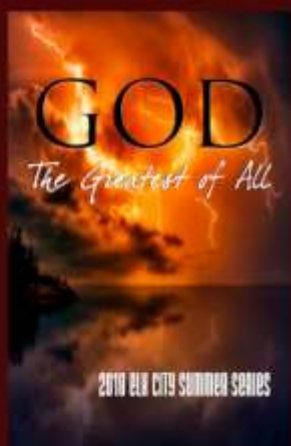
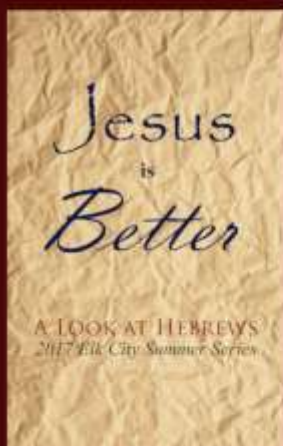
Also invited were my wife's co-worker and husband, Mandy and Matt. I was meeting them for the first time. Conversation and interaction were pure fun over a dinner of meatballs. Great dessert too—

Samoa cheesecake! After it all, clean-up started and disaster struck. The kitchen drain clogged and would not budge. Dirty dishes were stacked high and the dishwasher could not be used. The guests all departed. My thoughts turned to taking the next day off work and hoping quickly to find a plumber. And finally, to tackle the dishes.

Suddenly, a knock at the door—Matt and Mandy: *"Look—we were talking at the gas station and decided that we can't leave you in a jam like this. So here is what I am going to do—I will go buy plumbing parts and will replace all of it."* The job took about three hours and another run for parts, but Matt opened the drain and even made improvements. So relieved was I, that I was happily ready to pay plumber's wages. But they refused payment and would not even allow me to reimburse for the purchased parts!

The author of Hebrews was right. We entertained angels that day!

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MANY? FEW? WIDE? NARROW? WAY?

Bill Howard

How many times have we read or pronounced these five words? Have we ever taken any time to give consideration to their meaning? These are small words; how much meaning is there to discover by reflecting on them? On the surface we can say the meaning of each can vary; perhaps, it depends on the perspective, how we perceive them or to what we would use for comparison. For example, the Katy Freeway in Texas is purported to be the widest highway in the US at 175 feet. That is a wide road, we would readily agree. The Grand Canyon in Arizona at its narrowest point is 600 feet wide at Marble canyon. The width at 600 feet is quite wide compared to the 175-foot-wide highway in Texas, but it is narrow in comparison to the 18-mile (over 95,000 feet) width at the widest point of the canyon. So, we rightly say their meaning is determined by usage, as most words are. But, let's look at it from a different angle.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it

(Matthew 7:13-14).

These are words from Jesus' sermon from the mountain. Each of the words in this passage is conveying a very specific and meaningful message from our Lord, and a meaning not to be treated lightly or dismissed. It is critical that we have a full and complete understanding of the message. Jesus never uttered a word nor displayed an act that did not have specific intent and a truly important message for the observer, reader, and/or hearer. When reading, studying, or researching, it is a good practice to always look to the original Greek language in

order to have the most complete understanding possible. In so doing, we found insignificant difference between English and Greek. Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait (*thlibo*) gate," meaning narrow, and then also used "narrow (*stenos*) way," "wide (*platus*)," or spread out and wide, or "broad (*euruchoros*)," and finally "many (*polus*)" and "few (*oligos*)." However, there is nothing insignificant in any of Jesus' words, so there surely is reason to explore further every meaning which is intended in Christ's teaching. In order to accomplish this, we will drop back a couple thousand years for a bit of history.

Most likely 31 or 32 years prior to Jesus making the statement of which we wrote above, there was an event (an advent) which is mind-boggling. It was a happening like no other before or after, not counting the creation. It was the most marvelous, amazing happening in the annals of mankind. A young virgin gave birth to a child fathered by the Holy Spirit. How unlikely is this? It is impossible, you say. Yes, it would be impossible except that God is all-powerful, and when He says, "let there be," there is. For centuries, Prophets had foretold of this event. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin will conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Also in Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government will be upon His shoulder: And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). He was going to provide the means of forgiveness of sin and the capability of being reconciled to God. Since soon after man's creation, he sinned and broke the bond between God and mankind. We are well aware

that the animal sacrifices practiced by the Jews had no power to forgive sin. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). The writer of the Hebrew letter stated that *if* those sacrifices which they offered could do away with sin, there would be no reason to repeat them over and over. If they had been purged from sin, there would be no more awareness of sin, thus, no need for yearly sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1-2 paraphrased). This was the WAY given to the Israelites under the first Covenant between God and man. It was an adherence to the desires of God delivered by the prophets for keeping the rules, regulations, and edicts of the Levitical Priesthood. This being true, there had to be a more meaningful, more powerful sacrifice made for man to be cleansed from sin and move back into a proper relationship with God. A sacrifice so eloquent, so significant, so mind boggling that it would almost be unbelievable in the minds of mortal man: and God continued to execute His eternal plan.

Enter our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

(1 John 4:9-10)

This is the Son of God coming from heaven: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). The Apostle Paul to the Romans:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

(Romans 3:23-25)

In this gift, we can comprehend the depth and the richness of God’s love for man. No greater sacrifice could be offered than His Son Jesus. There could

not possibly be a more efficacious, more commanding, invincible offering than Christ.

Way

Now we will get around to the word WAY. You probably thought I had forgotten that, but the meaning of the word is a big part of the reason we are talking about it. As with the other words discussed, its meaning is dependent on usage. *Way* is used quite frequently and can convey the idea of habit, manner, or method, used as means, process, technique, course of action or road, pathway, trail, passage, etc. and many dozens of other uses. Simply put, it is like the other four words in our title. We determine its meaning by how it is used. Its usage here then takes on a meaning of gigantic proportions. We now know that because of man’s condition (sinful), a greater sacrifice than animal sacrifice was essential to restoring him to God. We read that because of God’s love He intended to provide that sacrifice, His Son Jesus who left heaven and came to earth in the most miraculous way imaginable, born of a young virgin, and tasked with the enormous undertaking of making a way for sinful man to be reconciled to the Father. John stated the Christ was to be the “propitiation for our sins,” an offering to make payment for, to absolve, and to do away with the penalty for sin. This is what God wanted: mankind to have a means of being freed from the devastating position of being separated from God.

So, this miraculous birth, the most meaningful event to ever take place to benefit mankind, and the sinless Christ willingly suffering the most savage, brutal, barbaric death conceivable, nailed to a wooden cross, making Himself to become sin who knew no sin in order that sinful man could be reconciled to the Father, opens our eyes to the meaning of the simple word, WAY, as Christ used it.

Let’s hear the words of the Savior at another time: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Now with this knowledge, the word Way becomes very significant and full of meaning. Jesus came to create the means of mankind returning to his Maker.

He, through His suffering, created that Way. He tells us that there is absolutely no other means of coming to the Father other than by Him. So, in this case, Way is Jesus—how much more meaningful can it get? It can't! Jesus has made a simple statement for all of mankind to ponder. If it is your choice to become a child of God, then it is through Jesus that you can achieve that status. This being true, why did Jesus talk about more than one way? He spoke of the narrow way and the broad way. Why? That question brings us to the reason for the study we have been making. This is the crux, the point of this writing, and it is a matter of life and death that we comprehend what has been and what will be set forth as we move toward the end.

God knew before He began the creation how man would comport himself. His centuries of putting up with the instability and waywardness of man just confirmed the necessity of having a thorough understanding of the requirements for being in His family. Every act of God has been only for the benefit of man, but He has never forced His way on anyone to accept His blessings; it has always been a matter of choice to accept or reject them. Jesus had to make it known that He was the one and only way to God. But in all fairness, He had to acknowledge the word “way” could mean several different avenues, paths, roads available for man to traverse. This was so evident in the ways of the Israelites, so evident in the early days of the church, and equally as evident in the morally bankrupt world of our time now. Paul so capably made known to Timothy how man could and possibly would act.

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

(2 Timothy 4:3-4 NLT)

And again:

For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents,

and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that.

(2 Timothy 3:2-5 NLT)

These are the acts which have been witnessed in the long ago past, continuing through the years, and are equally present today, if not worse.

All this being correct, we understand why Jesus pointed out that the only way to God is through Him. The narrow or strait gate will not be recklessly entered; we will enter only by carefully calculated obedience to God's will, and it is the only right way. There is a great diversity of choices on the broad path with the wide gate. It is very easy to enter this course; in the corrupt world of today, we are surrounded by evil. It would be easy to be pushed through the wrong gate simply by being a part of the worldly crowd, the unthinking crowd, the uncaring crowd, the crowd purposely dedicated to evil and immorality.

God made the narrow way to salvation and everlasting life go through the Son who gave His life as a sacrifice to pay the cost of sin. This way is available to all who will choose to enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow pathway. Satan has created everything that opposes God and made it simple and easy to take the course to eternal condemnation and is continually placing before us the deadly immoral ways that are of his making. We see why Jesus pointed out to us the true meaning of the five little words. In the end, our choices mean either heaven in the eternal presence of God or an unending suffering beside Satan in a permanent Hell. Remember, what the end will be is determined by what the way has been. Change course while it is still an option: time will be when the option is withdrawn. Think about it, which appeals to us the most, Heaven or Hell?

ERROR begets ERROR

Kyle D. Frank

In our study of the history of the early church fathers, we have seen how error began and how it grew in strength and intensity as time progressed. In previous articles we saw how the church was changed in structure due to the monarchical episcopacy. The rise of the Bishops was only just the beginning. That grew in structure as Bishops from the city were put over those in the country and the term “diocese” began to be used. Other unscriptural titles such as “Metropolitan” and “Patriarch” came to be seen and used. Error begets error. In this installment, we will take a small look at the origin of “Original Sin” and also that of “Infant Baptism.” The subject is broad and wide so space will dictate the extent of a look which we can take.

“Original Sin” teaches that children are born with the guilt of sin and are born in depravity. This idea, when applied, is the basis for infant baptism. You cannot speak of one in its broad sense without it leading to the other. They stand or fall together.

The idea of original sin cannot be seen in the writings of the early church fathers. The very early basis of the doctrine, but not the doctrine itself, can be seen in the writings of Irenaeus, where he discusses the “fact” that because of the fall, mankind was brought under the domination of Satan and also resulted in mankind losing the “divine likeness” of which he held previously. Through the writings of Origen, who lived from around 185 to 250 A.D., we can see more “foundations” of the doctrine, but not the fullness thereof. His theory was that all souls were created at the beginning of time, possessing free-will. Some chose good, some evil. Those who chose good then became angels, those choosing the

evil became the devil and his angels. The minor spirits who had sinned became the souls of men. What Origen was attempting to say was that the sin of those souls was in a previous state and not in this life. This is not “original sin” as we know it but is a fine jumping off place for those who were to follow.

The next major step was taken by Tertullian, who lived from 155-225 A.D. In his writings we can see the doctrine as we know it for the very first time. He refers to the soul sharing Adam’s guilt and sharing Adam’s punishment as well. Man’s condemnation is for sin previous to any particular sin an individual may have committed. This particular statement is where we first see this doctrine in its current form. In several of his many writings there are references made to his belief in man’s guilt as the result of Adam’s sin.

The next of the “apostolic fathers” (early Christian writers prior to 325 AD) is a fellow named Cae-cilius Cyprian who was the bishop of the church at Carthage from 248-258. He is the next to press the doctrine by saying an infant also needed forgiveness although it had not committed any sin of its own. The guilt that soul had was a result of Adam’s transgression and the passing down of that through the human family. He said the infant needed the forgiveness that only baptism could provide. Apparently, this appears to be the point where those two doctrines were combined. I was unable to find any direct correlation in any earlier writings, but surely it must be there. It would be most unusual for such to just “pop-up” with no prior notice.

Several references from earlier writers have been presented in an attempt to “prove” that infant bap-

tism was apostolic—but those who do so read an awful lot into these writings. One reference is from Justin who speaks of "many men and women of the age of sixty and seventy years who have been disciples of Christ from childhood" (*Apology* I, 15:6). Another is from Polycarp who says: "Eighty-six years have I served my king" (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9:3). Everett Ferguson in his *Early Christians Speak* (pg. 59) shows that those who promote original sin read too much into these ancient documents. They use other references the same way:

"For He came to save all through means of Himself—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God—infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths" (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* II.xxii.4).

We can see that these false doctrines did occur, just as Paul said that error would. We do not find these doctrines at the beginning. The teachings of the apostles and those who sat at their feet kept it from coming on. After that, these false doctrines appear to come from all different directions. Thus, it can be argued that sticking to the authorized writings and not the opinions of men is the ONLY way to stay away from error. Hebrews 13 tells us that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What pleased him back then is the same that will please him today. A "thus saith the Lord" is our only hope!!

Sources:

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- Early Christians Speak—Everett Ferguson
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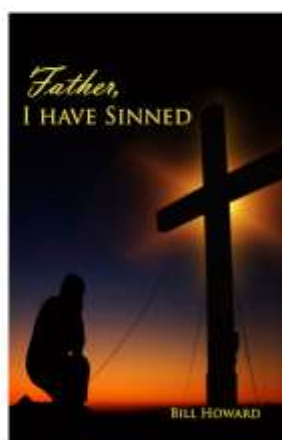
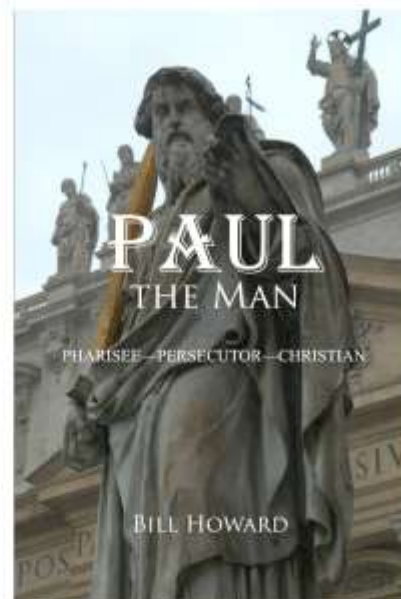
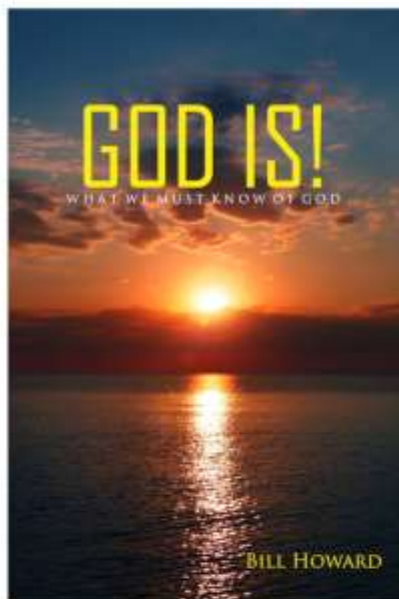
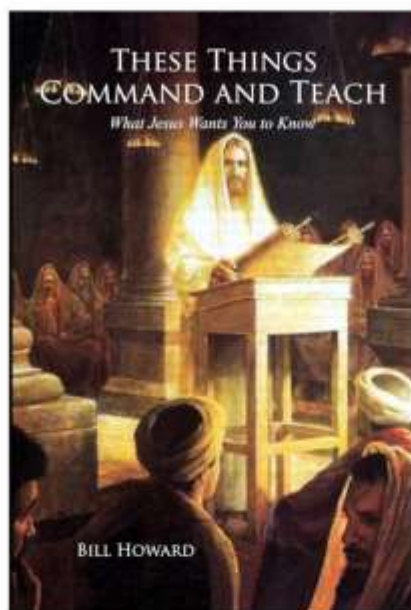
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QUOTES TO CONTEMPLATE

On Debt

Keep out of debt. Avoid it as you would war, pestilence and famine. Shun it as you would the devil. Hate it with a perfect hatred. Abhor it with an entire and absolute abhorrence. Dig potatoes, lay stone walls, peddle tin ware, do any thing that is honest and useful, rather than run in debt. As you value comfort, quiet, independence, keep out of debt. As you value good digestion, a healthy appetite, a placid temper, a smooth pillow, sweet sleep, pleasant dreams, and happy wakings, keep out of debt. Debt is the hardest of all task-masters, the cruelest of all oppressors. It is a millstone about the neck. It is an incubus on the heart. It spreads a cloud over the whole firmament of a man's being. It eclipses the sun, it blots out the stars, it dims and defaces the beautiful blue of the sky. It breaks up the harmony of nature and turns to dissonance all the voices of its melody. It furrows the forehead with premature wrinkles, it plucks the eye of its light, it drags all nobleness and kindliness out of the port and bearing of a man. It takes the soul out of his laugh, and all stateliness and freedom from his walk. Come not under its accursed dominion. Pass by it as you would pass by a leper, or one smitten by the plague. Touch it not. Taste not of its fruit, for it shall turn to bitterness and ashes on your lips. Finally, we say to each and to all, but we speak especially to you, young men, KEEP OUT OF DEBT.

Unsigned
Christian Messenger (Volume 12)

On Using Unbiblical Terms

We hold truth in the words in which God gave it, prophets wrote it, Christ spoke it and the apostles taught it. We will neither add to the words for popery, nor give them up for liberty. If the imperfect forms (of so-called truth) are taught in the Bible, it must be in Bible language. If that is the way God chose to teach them, that is the way we choose; if

we can learn them in Bible language, we have no need of formulas. If we cannot, then we did not learn them in the Bible.

Mark Fernald

On How We View God

Do you really think it does the Lord justice when our picture of Him is based on paint instead of power, on drawings instead of Deity?

Danny E. Davis
Closer to God

On the Origin of Catholic Practices

"Writers of the fourth century were prone to describe many practices (i.e., The Lenten Fast of Forty Days) as apostolic institutions which certainly had no claim to be so regarded" (*Cath. Ency.*, III, 484).

"One is forced to admit that the gradual corruption of Christianity began very early" (*Cath. Ency.*, XII, 414).

-Quoted in *Catholicism Against Itself*, Vol. 1
O.C. Lambert.

On Playing Cards

Card playing for amusement was another fearful evil which I was led into. It has since appeared to me to be an invention of Satan, to waste time, bewitch the mind, and lead to gambling, which has ruined so many, both for this world, and the world to come.

Mark Fernald (*Autobiography*)

On Fidelity to the Gospel

A changed gospel is not a gospel at all!

Chuck Wyeth
By Every Word, Workbook

On Fighting Error

If believers fail to take up the challenge of battling error, then truth can never prevail.

Bill Howard
God Is, 2022

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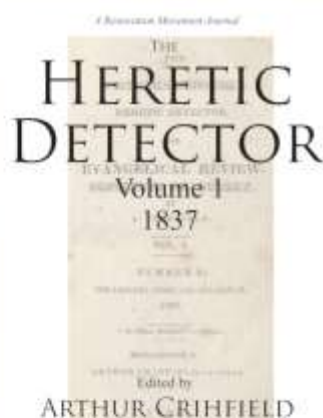
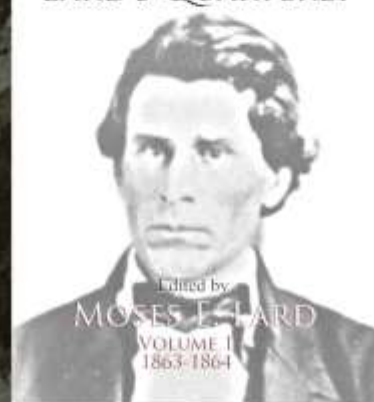
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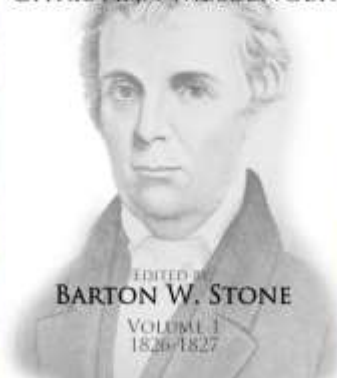
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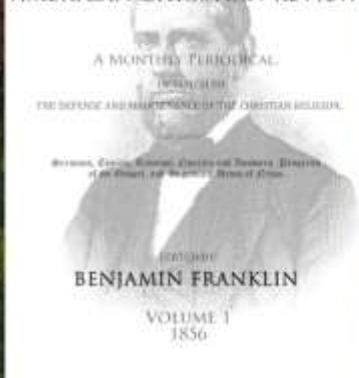
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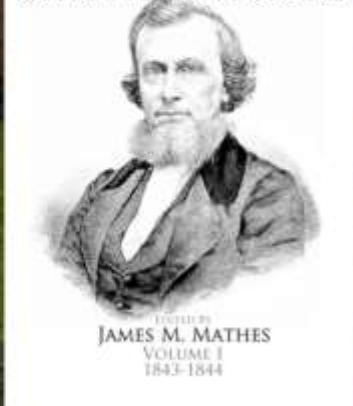
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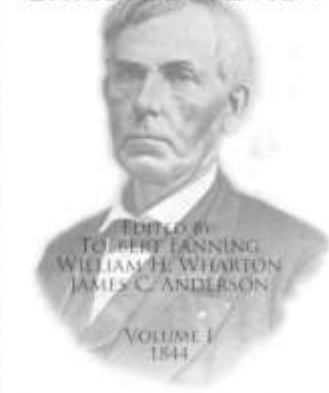
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THE ANOINTED OF GOD

Johnny O. Trail

The act of anointing a person to serve as king over God's people had a special significance. Samuel was privileged to anoint two of the first kings over the United Kingdom of Israel—Saul and David. The Old Testament and the New Testament have much to say about the meaning of “anointing” a person and its messianic importance.

Yahweh was always their King, but the people wanted to be like the other nations around them. 1 Samuel 8:7 says, “And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.” In accordance with the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14ff) and the commandment of God, Samuel then warns them about the consequences of having a human king (1 Samuel 8:10-18), but the people demand to be under the rule of an earthly king.

Samuel anointed Saul to serve as the first king over the nation of Israel. There is some question about the nature of his ordination and the title that Samuel gives Saul. 1 Samuel 9:16 says, “Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land

of Benjamin [Saul—JOT], and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me.” The word translated “commander” in the NKJV could also be translated as “captain, chief, governor, or ruler.”

After David is anointed and Saul perceives that he is a threat to his reign (1 Samuel 18:9), Saul pursues David and his men throughout various regions of the Ancient Middle East.

On two occasions, David has the opportunity to kill Saul and end Saul's pursuit of God's next anointed king. Nonetheless, David practiced wisdom and restraint in his unwillingness to kill Saul.

One might ask what is the significance of David's moderation regarding Saul? Notice what David says to Abishai in 1 Samuel 26:9-11.

But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?” David said furthermore, “As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come

to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go."

David would not so much as consider putting Saul to death, even though, by human standards, he had every reason. David would not even allow his commanders to harm a hair on Saul's head. He knew the significance of being God's anointed. This lesson would be lost on the contemporaries of Christ.

Various passages point out the sovereignty and divine appointment of the anointed over God's people. The king of Israel was selected by God to rule His people. Notice what the psalmist says about Jehovah's anointed. Psalm 2:2-7 says:

The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'"

This was significant in the Messianic promise that was made to the nation of Israel. The promises made to David helped the Jews conceptualize the arrival of the Messiah. 2 Samuel 7:16 says, "And your house [David—JOT] and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." From this passage and the ancient Israelite's understanding of the powerful Davidic throne, it becomes apparent that they anticipated an earthly kingdom with geographic borders and some sort of standing army. This could be part of the reason why the Apostles continuously miss the nature of the kingdom Jesus was going to establish (cf. Acts 1.16).

Andrew understood the identity of Jesus early on

during his encounter with Him. John 1:41 says, "He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ)." The word Christ can be translated as "the anointed." Jesus would also be proclaimed as the "King of Israel." John 1:49 says, "Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" This was merely another manner of saying that Jesus was the "anointed," the sovereign, or the Messiah.

Consequently, there is much to be said about David's understanding of God's anointed and the fact that Jesus was God's anointed. David would not think of harming Saul, but the Jewish rulers of Christ's age had no compunction in harming the anointed Son of God, even though He had done nothing deserving of death under the Law of Moses.

Jesus' life and death were a fulfillment of scriptures regarding His opposition in Psalm 2.1-2. Acts 4:27: "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together." The anointed King allowed Himself to die to establish His Kingdom (Matthew 16.13-19; cf.: Acts 20.28), so that all who obey the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; cf. Romans 6:3-4) might have eternal life.

Even though it was inscribed in derision, Pilate's inscription is ironically true. John 19:19-22 says,

Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

Let all who profess to follow Christ write His identity as Messiah upon their hearts!





THE IMAGE *of* GOD

Andy Robison

The world is full of competing philosophies and religions. At the core of all of the questions and dogmas that emanate from them is the purpose of each human being. Why are we here? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

Some would have us be no more than a cluster of accidental mutations that happened over billions of years. There is no purpose in life, then. We came from nothing but dust and accidents, and we will someday go away into oblivion. The consequences of such atheistic, evolutionary beliefs are multitude and malicious. The “survival of the fittest” doctrine eventually increases violence. “I’ll do what I want and if you get in my way, I’ll get you out of my way,” some will eventually think. And if there is no eternal consequence, their logic is correct. Nihilism results. “My life is meaningless; there is no purpose,” others hypothesize. This leads to depression and sometimes suicidal tendencies. To be sure, it is

not the only thing that leads to such; depression is a real, genuine, medical problem that often requires many kinds of treatment. Our only point here is that the nihilism that logically stems from evolutionary thought is—to understate the matter—most decidedly unhelpful.

Others see something special in human beings, but only inasmuch as all beings are special. We are on par with the animals, and animals deserve the same treatment, some say. Others go further and believe that inanimate objects have souls—we all have souls—and must be so treated. I read one time of someone trying to claim personhood and in-kind legal protection for a local river. Such a view delegitimizes human beings.

The fault with all these philosophies, though, is not only the outcome, but the origin. If an origin, a basis, a source, can be proven true, then the outcome must be whatever it may be.

We believe the field of Christian Evidences proves the Christian view of the world to be right. That is to say humans are above the animals, made in the image of God. This field of study provides evidence for the existence of God. Where there is a cause, there must be an anterior and adequate effect (that's a brief oversimplification of the Cosmological Argument). Where there is design, there must be a designer (the Teleological Argument). Where there is right and wrong, there must be a lawgiver above any human, for all humans' opinions are equal, but often in disagreement (the Moral Argument). Where there is evidence of fulfilled prophecy, unity, scientific foreknowledge, and such within a book, it had to have come from a higher power (the Bible). Where there is eyewitness testimony of a resurrected Man, together with prophecy fulfillments in His person, and the martyrdom of those who claimed their eyes saw Him after a very public crucifixion, there must be a resurrected Savior. All of these fields contribute to the validity, the veracity, the truth of the Christian religion. They help verify the claim of Jesus: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

Then, if those things be true, that revelation gets to speak to the worth of human beings. It does. Humans are higher than animals and rulers over the earth. On the sixth day of Creation, after all other beings were made, man and then woman were created and given the capacity and the authority to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28; 9:1-6). To be blunt, the earth is here for us, and not us for the earth (as angry as that will make some of the more radical environmentalists).

Within that framework we rightly ask, "Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going?" We came from God (Gen. 1:26-28). We are here to serve God (Eccl. 12:13-14). We are going to God (John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27-28).

It is within that framework that we ought to teach children. Too many children never get to hear how special they are. Parents keep them from church in increasing numbers. Some teachers lead them down ideological paths diametrically opposed to human

value and morality. They become nothing more than blobs for their own pleasure or, worse yet, someone else's pleasure.

I wish every child would inculcate the truth that he or she (yes, he or she) was made in the image of God. Each was made to be special and unique, but each was made to obey the common doctrine taught in God's word. Each was made with the potential for service, for kindness, for selflessness, for accomplishment. Wouldn't you love to ask each child the rhetorical questions of verse one of the attached song?

*Do you know, little child, what is in you?
Can you dream, little child, of going far?
Do you know, little child, of the power
you've been given?
Do you know, little child, whose you are?*

Citing the principles of duality (we are body and soul, not just material) and the special place of man just a little bit below the angels (and, as one said, not just a little higher than the monkeys) (Psalm 8:4-8), the chorus answers in the obvious strains:

*You were made in the image, in the image of
God,
Just a little bit below the angels,
And the masterpiece of heaven's hand is your
body and your soul.
You were made in the image...of God.*

A lot of children seem to sense that, or at least take to it instinctively. Get children from godless homes and bring them to a Vacation Bible School. They absolutely love being there and can't wait to get back every time their parents or grandparents or friends or neighbors will bring them. They feel the love. They sense the care. Perhaps they're thinking, "This is the way things ought to be all the time."

Those children grow up and become accountable. They learn the difference between right and wrong, and choose wrong. They sin, and need forgiveness. Often at tender, though comprehending, ages, they obey the Gospel of Christ. It is of no little significance that the one created in the image of God has been re-created in Christ. As Christians, they have

Christ dwelling in them (Gal. 2:20) and are God's special children (Gal. 3:26-27; 1 John 3:1-3). They need reminded. Thus,

Do you see, child of God of God, who is in you?

Do you see, child of God, where you belong?

Do you see, child of God, Christ, the Lord, who dwells within you?

Do you see, child of God, who makes you strong?

They will have cares and concerns; they will sometimes feel feeble, but the Lord dwelling in them will strengthen them (Eph. 6:10; 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

However, even those with much exposure to such good teaching and born again in Christ can be overcome by the world as they age a bit. How many generations have seen baptized younger ones (12-13) lost eventually to the strains of the supposedly progressive world? They are lost, often, to bodily abuse, sexual immorality, and a host of other sins. Paul addressed the sexual immorality issue in 1 Corinthians 6 when he spoke of how ugly a picture it was for a member of Christ to unite himself with a harlot (1 Cor. 6:12-17). Awful, indeed. When a member of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13) engages in sin, the temple of the Holy Spirit of God is defiled (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

I don't pretend to know all the answers to preventing such, but it sure can't hurt to remind them of their status with the Lord and how they have the privilege and duty of keeping the temple of God pure.

Do you care, precious one, who is in you?

Do you care, precious one, who's in your soul?

Do you care, precious one, for the temple of the Spirit?

Do you care, precious one, to be whole?

Adults ought to be charged with remembering that children are made in the image of God. Children are being abused all over the place. Many are being trafficked. Some are being raised in cohabitation circumstances, where heterosexual parents are

unmarried and even parade a promiscuous plethora of partners through the bedroom doors. Some are raised in homosexual homes, learning that so-called morality to be the norm. Some are hit, some are murdered.

Still others venture out into their worlds to be told by the godless that they were mistakenly made—that they can reassign their gender and change their person totally. They are encouraged, in some cases, perhaps to buck parental advice and mar their bodies forever. God made them in His image, male and female (Gen. 1:27). If children could know God's love, perhaps they could be spared from being pawns in some adults' all-out rebellion against reality. God loves them as He made them, in His image, male or female, and whether beautiful or not in the eyes of the world.

The children need to know, for their own sakes, for their behavior's sake, for their esteem's sake, they are made in the image of God. Adults need to learn those children are made in the image of God, and take such into account so as to not treat them like animals, not treat them like playthings or property. Parents need to understand that when they conceive children, they've formed eternal souls that will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. They need to correct whatever might be wrong in their lives and raise those children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

It all starts with philosophy. It all starts with the correct mindset of Christianity. If people would follow that, the children would be treated much better. The children would grow up to treat themselves better. Everyone needs to know they are made in the image of God.

To hear the song, *In the Image of God*, to print a copy, or to access the PowerPoint slides (all for free), use this link:

<https://www.churchofchristsongs.com/content/image-god-andy-robison>

In the Image of God

A.R. Andy Robison

1. Do you know, lit - tle child, what is in you? Can you
 2. Do you see, child of God, who is in you? Do you
 3. Do you care, pre - cious one, who is in you? Do you

dream lit - tle child of go - ing far? Do you
 see, child of God, where you be - long? Do you
 care, pre - cious one, who's in your soul? Do you

know, lit - tle child, of the pow - er you've been giv - en? Do you
 see, child of God, Christ the Lord who dwells with - in you? Do you
 care, pre - cious one, for the tem - ple of the Spi - rit? Do you

know lit - tle child, whose you are? Do you
 see, child of God, who makes you strong? Do you
 care, pre - cious one, to be whole? You were

made in the im - age, in the im - age of God, just a

lit - tle bit be - low the an - gels. And the

mas - ter - piece of heav - en's hand is your

bo - dy and your soul; you were made in the im - age; you were

made in the im - age; you were made in the im - age of God,

in the im - age of God.

Immanuel—God with Us

(A Sermon Outline)

Jake Schotter

INTRODUCTION

1. In Matthew 22:42, Jesus asked the Pharisees two questions about His identity:
 - a) *“What do you think about the Christ?”*
 - b) *“Whose son is He?”*
2. It is in this same discussion that Jesus draws their attention to David’s statement in Psalm 110:1 about how David calls Jesus *“Lord”* yet is His *“son.”*
3. We’re not going to answer that question today, but it brings up a common pattern for us to be familiar with in Matthew’s gospel.
4. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. Some of these distinctive elements include:
 - a) The opening genealogy, where he showed the ancestry of Jesus going back not only to David, but to Abraham!
 - b) He quotes Old Testament prophetic passages more than 60 times, emphasizing how Christ is the fulfillment of those promises, especially with the introductory clause, *“it has been fulfilled.”*
 - c) Unlike other gospels, Matthew usually cites Jewish custom without explaining it (Mark 7:3; John 19:40)
 - d) He constantly refers to Christ as *“the son of David”* (10 times – 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45)
 - e) Matthew even keeps with Jewish custom regarding the name of God, referring to *“the kingdom of heaven”* instead of *“the kingdom of God,”* as other writers do. That phrase appears 32 times and it is only used by Matthew.
 - f) So, Matthew is seeking to show the Jews that Jesus is their long-awaited Messiah and to place their faith in Him.
5. One of the places we see some of these elements is in Matthew 1:23 where the angel told Joseph to call the Son soon to be born, *“Immanuel... God with us.”*
 - a) Today, we will look at the background of the name – where Matthew gets this statement.
 - b) We will also focus on why this name is so beautiful—Jesus is given this name for a reason, that it represents a part of who He is and what kind of person He is to be in His ministry.

The Background of the Name (Isaiah 7-8)

- A. The situation (Isaiah 7:1-9)
1. Matthew, in his formulaic way of introducing fulfilled prophecy, wrote *“this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet”*
 - a) It is important to realize this was not just a far-placed prophecy about the future.
 - b) It had an immediate impact on the current events of the day
 2. So, what was the situation of Isaiah’s day?
 - a) Read 7:1-4
 - b) “Fear gripped the royal family of Judah when news arrived of the impending invasion by the forces of [Damascus and Samaria]. In anticipation of a siege, the king began to inspect his defenses and especially his water supply system. Though Ahaz was no paragon of virtue, he was after all the legitimate representative of the house of David. For this reason the Lord dispatched Isaiah to approach the king with a word encouragement in this moment of national crisis” (James E. Smith, **The Major Prophets**, p. 44)
 3. How was the king reassured? Seven means...
 - a) A symbolic name (7:3) (Shear-jashub, Isaiah’s son, means “a remnant shall return”)
 - b) Four commands (7:4a) that suggest the king had nothing to worry about
 - c) A metaphor (7:4b) – the enemies’ anger was like smoldering firebrands – it will extinguish itself out soon enough
 - d) Their rulers (7:5) – they only had earthly, human rulers in charge of them
 - e) A promise (7:7) that the plot to overthrow will not work
 - f) A long-range prediction (7:8) – Ephraim would cease to exist within 65 years.
 - g) A simple plan (7:9) – all the king had to do was believe the promise and his place would be established on the throne.
 4. As you continue reading, however, you will find that Ahaz had made his mind up with a political solution instead of trusting God.
 - a) Ahaz is guilty of violating the nature of his covenant with God and his disregard is further demonstrated when he pays the Assyrian king in part with silver and gold from the temple of God
 - b) 2 Kings 16:7-8 adds, *“So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser*

king of Assyria, saying, 'I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me.' Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria."

B. The sign (7:10-14)

1. Now, Ahaz does not want a sign because he is not open to the option of trusting God
2. As James Smith wrote, "If these words were the resolve of a godly man, they would be admirable. In the present circumstances, however, they mask stubborn unbelief and hypocrisy... Ahaz's defiant rejection of the gracious offer of a sign was now trying the patience of God himself." [**The Major Prophets**, p. 45]
3. The sign is found in verse 14. This is our focus because that is where we are introduced to the name "Immanuel."
 - a) A virgin would conceive and bear a son
 - b) The son's name will be "Immanuel"
4. There is a multitude-ness of material available discussing the specifics of this prophecy and what Isaiah meant.
 - a) We know, based on the usage of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) and Matthew, that the word means "virgin" instead of an unmarried young woman.
 - b) That makes sense when you consider this to be a distinct sign, not a regular occurrence of Israelite ethical and social standards.
 - c) Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognized the unique nature of this birth and how this prophesy could be used as a double fulfillment to Ahaz and also as a reference to Christ.

C. The security (8:1-10)

1. Chapter 8 further develops the theme of chapter 7.
 - a) The invasion would fail
 - b) However, because Judah had failed to put her trust in the Lord, she would be faced with an even greater threat: Assyria
2. In light of these developments, Isaiah urged his people to focus on God alone as the only source of deliverance.
3. The key doctrine taught here is encapsulated in the name "Immanuel – God is with us!"
 - a) The plans of the Assyrian king would not succeed – for Judah was

Immanuel's land.

- b) Whether the invader be from Syria, Assyria, or any nation for that matter, they would be doomed to defeat
 - c) For the sake of Immanuel, God would stand by His people (8:8, 10)
4. What makes this name so beautiful for us? Why is this specific prophesy so applicable to us today?
- a) It's more than having the details match between the account of the birth and the original setting of the prophesy, as important as they are
 - b) The name is beautiful because of what it means!

The Beauty of the Name (Matthew 1:23)

- A. The name "Immanuel" demonstrates that Jesus is divine ("GOD")
- 1. Jesus is God in human form!
 - 2. Scripture plainly teaches this union between Christ's divinity and His humanity. Listen to these passages that reinforce this point over and over again in Scripture
 - a) *"...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"* (Philippians 2:6-8)
 - b) John 1:1-3, 14, 18
 - c) John 14:7, 11
 - d) *"Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same"* (Hebrews 2:14)
 - e) Many others could be added (Galatians 4:4-5; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3)
 - 3. The incarnation had to happen for several reasons:
 - a) To confirm God's promises – the prophesy of this name is only a small feature of all the Old Testament data about Jesus, the coming Messiah, God who will spend time as a man with men.
 - b) To reveal the Father – Jesus taught that to see Him was to see the Father. He was the exact representation and further displayed God as a Father, not just creator and ruler.
 - c) To become a faithful high priest – Christ came that He might enter into every human experience, apart from sin, so that He might be qualified as a high priest. High priests were to faithfully represent men (Hebrews 2:10, 17)
 - d) To put away sin

- (1) Mark 10:45 says that Jesus came to be *“a ransom for many”*
- (2) *“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 5:21)
- (3) *“You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin”* (1 John 3:5)
- e) To destroy the works of the devil – further in that same passage (1 John 3), John wrote in verse 8, *“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.”*
- f) To give us an example of a holy life (1 Peter 2:21 says, *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps”*)
- g) To prepare for the 2nd coming (Hebrews 9:27-28 declares, *“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”*)

B. The name “Immanuel” demonstrates that Jesus is not distant, He is near! (*“With us”*)

- 1. Being with Jesus is a security in maintaining our relationship with Him.
 - a) This was the purpose of the sign of the baby to be born in Isaiah 7-8 named “Immanuel.”
 - b) If you are not with God, you are lost. You are an enemy of God.
 - (1) *“For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God”* (Deuteronomy 4:24).
 - (2) *“Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them.”* (Ezekiel 8:18).
 - c) Yet, if you are in Christ, you are secure! What a comfort, what assurance!
 - (1) *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character;*

and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:1-5).

(2) Security is found when you are near to Christ – when your faith clings to Christ you are able to persevere through this difficult life.

2. Being with Jesus is a stimulus in our relationship with Him.
 - a) Having a relationship with Jesus ought to be more than sufficient encouragement for us to live in a way that glorifies Him in every aspect of our lives!
 - b) Ephesians 4:17-24 (notice v. 20: “*you did not learn Christ in this way*” and goes on to discuss how their behavior reflects Christ’s life!)
 - c) The transformed person lives a life that is constantly being transformed by the power of the presence of God in our lives.
 - d) “*Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant*” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6a)
 - e) Paul ends the chapter with, “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Conclusion

1. When we consider the incarnation of Christ, we can only begin to go into the depths of the reality of Jesus Christ’s identity, who is truly God and for a time, truly man.
2. When we consider the name, “Immanuel...”
 - a) We are reminded of the power of God
 - b) We are reminded of the presence of God – God is with us!!
 - c) We are reminded of the pursuit of God – He wants us to be saved and have a deep and meaningful relationship with Him
3. Invitation: Immanuel is a title of fact: “God is with us.” But, everything in the life of Jesus and the nature of God makes this a demonstration of His desire to be more than a theological reality – He wants to be a personal reality in each and every one of our lives. “God is with us” through Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling – but you must be a Christian, you must have a personal relationship with Jesus – for that to be the case. If your relationship is not in the right place at this moment with God, let’s fix that right now! God has said, “I want to be with you,” will you say the same?

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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 to 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 sons) live in Alabama.

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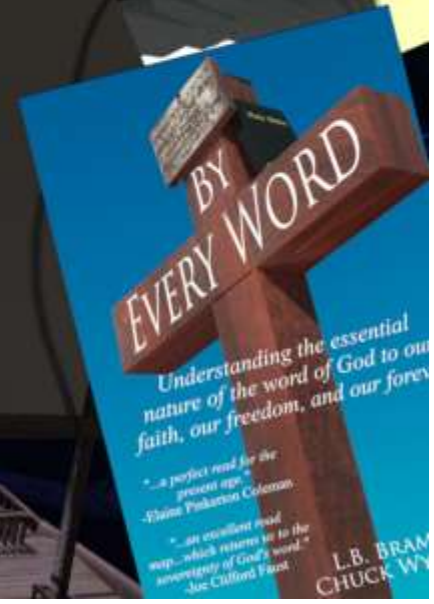
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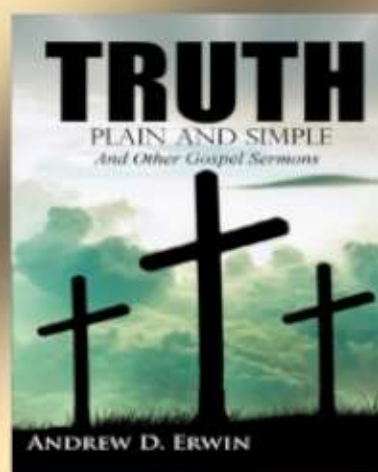
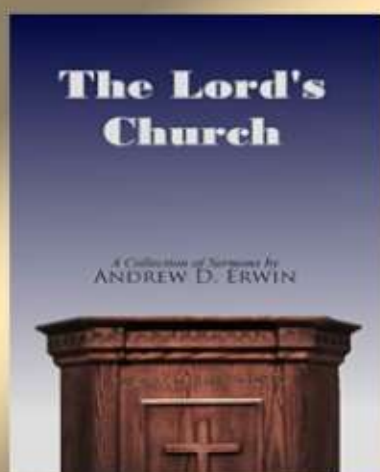
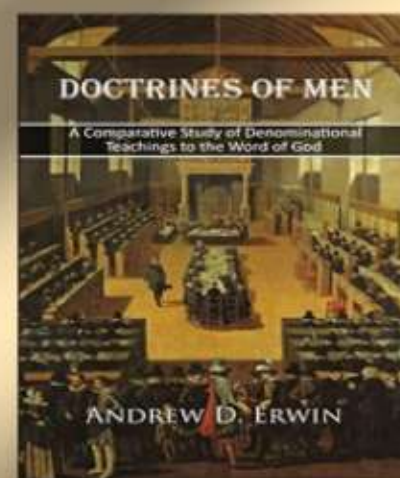
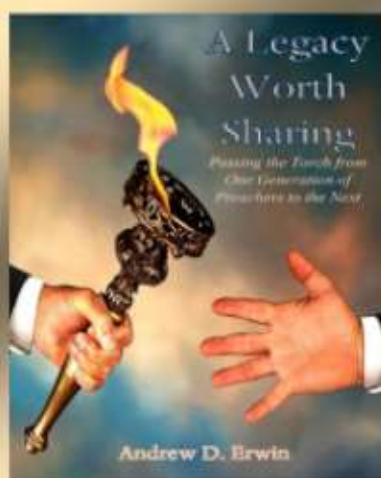
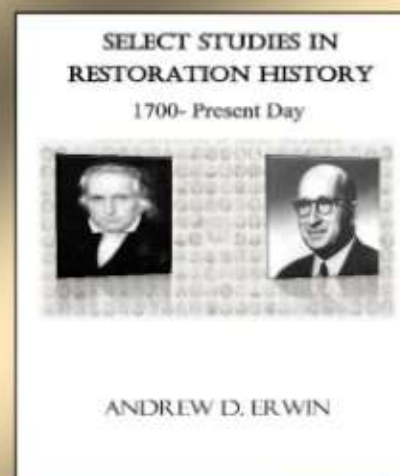
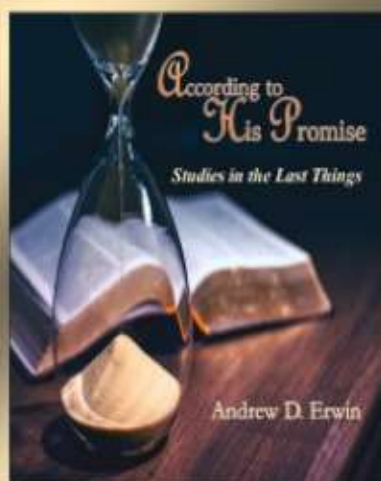
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