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Another

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Stop "Baptizing" the
Little Kids!

The Evolution of
"Adjusting" God's Law
on Marriage

Thou Shalt Not Covet

How to Change Yourself
and Your Relation to
God

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Where do Mistakes Go
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The Quarterly

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

VOLUME 7 – NUMBER 4 – OCTOBER 2023

DIFFERENT STYLES ARE A BENEFIT, NOT A DETRIMENT, IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Maybe this should have been my editorial for the issue, but I figure I'd put it here, right at the beginning. And that's for a reason. I've heard from several readers who have their favorite authors and make a point to read their articles first. And there are other writers that they don't care for as much, and might delay or even skip their articles on occasion. They just aren't fans of the style of one writer or another.

And that's fair.

But what isn't fair is when people equate "I don't like their style," with "They aren't faithful Christians." Some forceful brethren have in times past condemned more congenial brethren as "weak" and "unfit for the kingdom." And some who are more "nice guys" condemn the forceful brethren as "unloving" and "legalistic." And honestly, neither is really a fair representation.

God used Elijah, who sarcastically mocked the prophets of Baal in public ("Yell louder, maybe Baal's relieving himself") and was public enemy #1 to the king and queen. I think some brethren might say he was too mean and harsh. God used John, whose continual refrain of "love" would be enough to make many brethren today call him a liberal, were he a preacher today.

All this to say, the writers in this magazine aren't carbon copies of each other in writing or personalities. And God is using each one of them in different ways.

Maybe I'm just in a bit of a mood after being told someone wouldn't contribute any more articles because he refuses to be associated with some of the other writers. Now might be a good time to read the disclaimer below...

-Bradley S. Cobb

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

WHAT TO FIND AND WHERE TO FIND IT

(AKA: The Contents of the Quarterly)

Thanks

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb..... 6

Restoration Moments: Raccoon John Smith Tries to Immerse a Methodist Preacher Against His Will

John Augustus Williams 8

Doppelgangers

John Krivak..... 9

How The Ten Commandments Relate to 21st Century Christians: Thou Shall Not Covet

Charles R. Rose..... 13

The Evolution of “Adjusting” God’s Marriage Law

Hugh Fulford 19

When God’s Word Ceases to Matter

Jim Mitchell..... 21

Let Us Love One Another

Roy Knight 34

Dealing With Anger

Adam Cozort 35

The Life of Christ (Part 3) Why Don’t the Genealogies Match?

Bradley S. Cobb 36

Stop “Baptizing” the Little Kids!

Caleb Robertson 45

1 Corinthians 4: A New Translation and Commentary

Matthew Shaffer 53

Go and Sin No More	
<i>Bill Howard</i>	61
How To Change Yourself And Your Relation To God—A Pattern for Self-Help and Self-Improvement	
<i>Gerald Cowan</i>	65
DO WHAT YOU CAN WHILE YOU STILL CAN	
<i>A Poem by Gerald Cowan</i>	69
The Weaker Vessel	
<i>John Krivak</i>	70
How I Got Out of the Maze of Sectarianism (or why I Rejected Denominationalism)	
<i>J. Ira Jones</i>	75
What is Your Favorite Verse?	
<i>Curtis Hartshorn</i>	79
He Removed the Sting	
<i>Johnny O. Trail</i>	80
Quotes to Contemplate	83
Where Do Mistakes Go When You Rub Them Out?	
<i>Roymond Elliot</i>	85
The Manicheans	
<i>Kyle D. Frank</i>	87
The Identity of the Church Leads to Fellowship	
<i>Jake Schotter</i>	88
About the Authors	89

THANKS

An Editorial by Bradley S. Cobb

In the gospel accounts, the word “thanks” or “thanksgiving” shows up 19 times. 17 of those times are either Jesus giving thanks, or teaching about giving thanks. The other two times *involve* Jesus, but the giving of thanks is done by someone else.

Luke 17:11-19 – A Samaritan Leper.

Here we find a group of 10 lepers who had heard about Jesus, and when they saw Him, they hollered out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,” because they were keeping their distance (as required by the Law of Moses).

These men were outcasts of society. They were unclean. No one wanted to be around them, because they were afraid they might catch leprosy from them. No one would hire a leper. No one would buy from a leper. And leprosy in its advanced forms can so mutilate the body that you couldn’t do any work. It could leave you swollen and hunched over, covered in sores—and it was not uncommon for lepers to lose fingers and toes as a result of the disease.

Jesus looks at them, takes pity on them, and told them to go show themselves to the priest (as required by Old Testament law). And they all immediately head that way, and they find their leprosy is gone. Imagine that for a moment. The swelling—gone. The sores all over your body—gone. The pain that comes with just moving—gone. The thing that made everyone scared to be around you (and quite probably made you the object of ridicule and mockery from some folks)—gone. You’re able to see your friends again. You’re able to see your family again. You can work again.

How happy would you be?

I have no doubt that every one of the ten now-former lepers were very happy. Probably excitedly talking

to each other about how great it was. Maybe they were hoopin and hollerin. But being happy and being thankful aren't the same thing.

One of the men, when he realized he was healed, loudly praised God as he went back to Jesus (and I wouldn't be surprised if he ran back to Jesus), fell on his face and thanked Jesus. And Luke points out that this man was the most outcast of them all—not just a leper, but a Samaritan too.

Luke makes a point of noting that this was the only man who came back. Jesus said, “weren't there ten of you? Where are the other nine?”

If you're *really* thankful, you will express that thanks. You could say “I'm happy I got the new job,” but that isn't the same as “God, thank you for helping me get this new job.” Happy and grateful are not the same thing.

So, if you're *really* thankful, you will actually thank the giver (whether that be God or a family member/friend/stranger).

Luke 2:38 – Anna the prophetess.

She came in the temple when baby Jesus was there (about the time Simeon had given his prophecy about Him). Then she thanked God, and went around, telling everyone she could about Baby Jesus.

True thankfulness to God means you are excited to tell others about what God has done for you.

We often share good news, but we share it in a way that leaves God out of it.

- “I got a raise at work.”
- “My cancer test came back negative.”
- “It is our anniversary!”

Think about how you might re-word those statements to include God in your gratitude.

Do you think Anna ran around Jerusalem saying, “Hey, there's a baby at the temple. Woohoo!”? Or do you think, just maybe, she told people something along the lines of, “God has remembered His people, and has sent His Messiah,” or, “The Messiah was just born, God has blessed us!”?

If we are truly thankful to God for something, we ought to make sure we give Him the glory, give Him the credit for those things when we share them with others.

Imagine you went out of your way to help someone in need. Maybe it was lining up a job for them, or buying them a car, or feeding their family. And you happen to overhear them talking. “Hey, check out this new car I got.” Or “Here's some food I picked up, kids.” And no mention is made of the fact that it was a gift. No show of appreciation for the source of the good thing (ever if the source isn't named). In fact, it sure sounds like they are taking complete credit for acquiring this good thing. How do you feel?

Do you appreciate ingratitude?

Let's not treat God that way.

A lack of gratitude towards God is a sin worthy of death!

*Romans 1:21 – “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, **neither were thankful.**”*

Did you catch that? A lack of gratitude towards God is mentioned alongside a refusal to glorify Him.

And the Paul concludes the chapter by saying that all those who do such things are worthy of death. Being thankful to God isn't just a good idea, it's necessary for your salvation!

Are you showing your thankfulness to God by expressing it, living it, and sharing it?

RESTORATION MOMENTS: RACCOON JOHN SMITH TRIES TO IMMERSE A METHODIST PREACHER AGAINST HIS WILL

John Augustus Williams
From "The Life of Elder Raccoon John Smith"

[...Raccoon John Smith] went out on Slate Creek and began to preach the ancient gospel among the Methodists and Baptists of that region. An itinerant of the Methodist Church was already on the ground, and the attention of the people was soon divided between the two preachers. Smith had but few brethren in the neighborhood, and the views of the pedobaptists generally prevailed. The two congregations met in groves not far apart, and each emulated the enthusiasm of the other. Soon a number of anxious penitents found religion at the Methodist altar; and soon Smith began to immerse believers on the profession of their faith in Christ.

One day a mother brought her infant into the Methodist congregation, that it might receive baptism at the hands of her preacher. Water was applied according to the custom of his church, no regard being paid to the cries and struggles of the child, that with all its strength resisted the ordinance.

On the next day Smith, in the presence of all the people who crowded the banks of the beautiful stream hard by, led forth ten persons, one by one, into the water, and immersed them for the remission of sins. Seeing the Methodist preacher in the crowd, he walked up from the stream and pressed, through to the place where he stood. The song went on, for the people supposed that another candidate was about to be buried in baptism. Seizing the preacher by the arm, he pulled him gently but firmly along toward the water. Resistance would have been in vain; for the *dipper*, as the people now began to call him, was a man of powerful muscle.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Smith?" said the man, uncertain what the strange procedure meant.

"What am I going to do!" said Smith, affecting surprise at the question. "I am going to baptize you,

sir!"

"But I do not wish to be baptized," said the man, trying to smile at what he deemed to be rather an untimely jest, if, indeed, it was a jest at all.

"Do you not believe?" said Smith.

"Certainly I do," said the preacher.

"Then come along, sir," said the *dipper*, pulling him still nearer to the water, "believers must be baptized!"

"But," said the man, now uneasy at the thought that possibly it might not be a joke at all, "I'm not willing to go. It certainly would do me no good to be baptized against my will."

Smith now raised his voice so that the multitude could hear, for the song had ceased, and every ear was open to catch his words. "Did you not," said he, "but yesterday baptize a helpless babe against its will, though it shrunk from your touch, and kicked against your baptism? Did you get its consent first, sir? Come along with me, for you must be baptized!" and with one movement of his powerful arm he pulled the unwilling subject to the water's edge. The preacher loudly and earnestly protested, and the *dipper* released his hold. Looking him steadily in the face, he said: "You think, sir, that it is all right to baptize others by violence, when you have the physical power to do it; but when you yourself are *made* the unwilling subject, you say it is wrong, and will do no good! You may go for the present: but, brethren and friends," said he, lifting up his voice to the people, who now perceived the purpose of the jest, "let me know if he ever again baptizes others without their full consent; for you yourselves have heard him declare that such a baptism cannot possibly do any good!"

DOPPELGÄNGERS

John Krivak

The literary quality of the Jacob cycle in Genesis is sky high, which is to say that this Bible history tells a great story. Combining reliable history with great story-telling is the hallmark of biblical narrative. Like a high-quality historical documentary, we get the true facts undergirding an intriguing storyline. Where history and story coalesce under Divine inspiration, the Word accomplishes all of God's purposes. History is His story.

One peculiar literary feature stands out. Virtually everything occurs in twos, in duplication. Like Jacob himself, each has its twin. For example, Jacob's father is nearly blind, causing him unintentionally to bless the wrong child. When aged, Jacob does it also (although intentionally). Those better at close reading may find "twins" that others might miss (like-wise those who can read the Hebrew text). But what is the significance? This schema of twos drives an overarching system of judgment. Whenever any character sins, it always rises up in his face through some "twin" character, or some duplicated (often reversed) situation. This perpetrator must suffer humbling confrontation through a mirrored evil.

By this point in Genesis, sin is no longer stark, episodic, and plain. Evil deeds were shocking in the opening chapters, and rare; but then the infection quickly metastasizes. And by Jacob's day, sin has been raised to an absolute art form that thoroughly permeates even the most casual interactions. For example, read closely the ways that Jacob interacts with Esau, or with Laban. Every interaction conceals strategic conniving—on both sides! It is so thick and dense that readers are hard-pressed to differentiate hero from villain. We happily, therefore,

defer to the omniscient narrative Presence that matches every evil with its twin. Justice will be served!

Jacob and Esau—twins from birth.

The birth of twins, Jacob and Esau, sets up rivalry and conflict. They are not identical twins, however, and their distinguishing features fuel lively adversity. Hairy Esau hunts deer; smooth-skinned Jacob raises goats. Esau is favored by his father; Jacob by his mother (Jacob will later create favoritism in his own family). Even before birth, God selects the younger twin to win-out over the older. This reversal of the natural order creates instability within the story.

Jacob (the heel-grabber) double-swindles Esau (both out of the birthright and the fatherly blessing). These rightly belong to the firstborn. Later, Jacob's wives (not twins, but doubles as sisters) suffer double losses (their dowries and inheritance) from their father, Laban. The big swindle of father Isaac is worked jointly by Jacob and his mother Rebekah. They are shrewdly intelligent, aggressive in exploiting other family members. Esau and his father are dimwitted dupes, easy marks. Before launching bold-faced lies, Jacob frets that he might appear to be a deceiver (27:12)—imagine that! To pull off the crime, God is implicated as his accomplice (just as Adam had done in Eden, Gen. 3:12):

"Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?' And he said, 'Because the LORD your God caused it to happen to me'."

(Genesis 27:20)

In a very strange way, the accusation against God is absolutely true! When Esau finally assesses the damage done against him, he weeps authentically. Jacob will later cry strategically, and eventually the brothers will weep together when reunited (which, then, is authentic and which is bamboozle?).

The rivalry reaches full crisis, and Esau is scarcely prevented from murdering his brother (shades of Cain and Abel). Jacob flees, both to escape Esau and to seek an approved wife (unlike the obnoxious Hittite wives of his brother—of course, there are two of them). He goes with father Isaac's blessing that God will make for him a "company" of peoples (there will be two). And on the way, God extends the Abrahamic covenant-blessing in Jacob's dream-vision of a ladder to Heaven (28:12ff.). Jacob's confidence soars so high after pulling this off, that he starts wheeling-and-dealing with God. If God will agree to certain terms, then Jacob's His man! Is he feeling bullet-proof, that not even God holds him to account for his sins? He has gotten away seemingly clean with his treachery.

Jacob and Laban—twins as con-artists.

One cannot tell which is the better man. As a reader, I'm not so sure! When Jacob first encounters Rachel—he immediately turns to look at her sheep (and sees dollar signs?)! I mean, what sort of man does this? This is pathological. Rachel would get laser-beam focus from any normal young man, with all periphery (sheep!) lost in a romantic blur. And, does anyone think Jacob's man-tears are genuine when (after first tending the sheep) he begins to woo her?

The ensuing interaction between nephew and uncle is conniving gamesmanship, deception and cheating. And, they are playing for keeps. I think Laban marks him straight off. Even before Jacob can literally clean house, Uncle Laban is already hatching a 20-year con job. Jacob has met his match—his perfect match! And just as God had elevated him over Esau, Jacob is allowed by God to get the better of Laban (it's not because Jacob was the

better brother, or the better man). As with the twin brothers, rivalry now pits the two sister-wives against each other, and hubby Jacob must catch the brunt of it. To dodge responsibility, he again puts God on the hook:

"Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die.' Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?'"

(Genesis 30:1–2)

We sense that Jacob deserves all he gets, that he needs to learn his lesson!

The competition to give Jacob children, between Rachel and Leah, draws in their two maids as concubine-wives. Barren Rachel finally scores through her Bilhah: *"With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed"* (30:2). The "mighty wrestlings" are literally "wrestlings of God" (30:8), foreshadowing the wrestling between Jacob and God (Jacob's name will become Israel—"he who wrestles against God"). Of course, Leah has her own handmaid, Zilpah, to ensure a perfectly matched competition.

After playing shrewdly for decades, Jacob gathers all the marbles and splits. Rachel and Leah sense that their father has robbed them of dowry and inheritance (31:14–15). Though Jacob is an embezzler, he accuses Laban of cheating. This entire interaction is just too rich with ironic hypocrisy! God is again implicated (31:42). Laban (himself a thief) accuses Jacob of the theft of his household gods (and, through Rachel, he unwittingly did). Was justice served by God siding with Jacob? Has God let Jacob off the hook yet again?

Jacob and God—twins in wrestling match.

After 20 years of safety, meeting Esau again is inevitable. Jacob gets comfort from a second angelic visitation. He named the location Mahanaim—"two camps or companies" (one of God's angels; the other of his family). After messaging Esau, his strategy

is to subdivide his vast estate into two companies, even separating his two wives. Ahead of them, Jacob sends waves of extravagant gifts—each with an overture from “servant” Jacob to “lord” Esau! This flattery is plainly a deceptive head-fake, designed to distract from the grand larceny that forever will subvert the family order. As ever, Jacob works strategically and you cannot trust a word he says. When word comes that Esau is on the way—and 400 men are with him, Jacob prays for help!

During the stressful wait, Jacob wrestles with “a man” (32:24). It becomes apparent that he is wrestling with God! The contest is so evenly matched that it lasts all night long. The opponents are virtual twins, or doubles! Jacob demands a blessing and gets a new name:

“Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”

(Genesis 32:28)

Jacob and Esau—twins reunited.

Esau finally gets to Jacob through barrages of calculated goodwill. Against expectation, the cheated twin demonstrates forgiveness and grace. He receives Jacob warmly. We wonder, however, does this demonstrate virtue? Or is this more stupidity, that sets Esau up to be duped yet again? Then again, we may wonder, was Esau’s warm reception of Jacob really genuine (accompanied by 400 men!)? Rivalry makes trust difficult in both directions. Jacob promises to rejoin him later, but instead, the deceiver goes another way.

An interpretation.

What happened to Jacob, why did it happen, and what does it mean? The artfulness of the storytelling lends itself to the following interpretation.

God superintends the flow of events, even where God’s activity is not narrated. Everything happens under divine direction. We get tip-offs of His narrative presence in every set of twins, every pairing in two’s. Jacob is made to meet his three twins: Esau, Laban, and God. Each one, in his own way, is seen

as the exact double of Jacob! When Jacob looks at any one of these, God is forcing him to look at himself. The mirror does not lie (as Jacob does). Self-appraisal is often uncomfortable, and never easy. Sometimes, when we catch others in their failings, we are such obvious twins that—if we can be honest—we implicate ourself! Each of the three serves as a foil to show up Jacob’s true self—but each does so in a different and unique way.

In Esau, Jacob sees himself—a brother looking for acceptance, esteem, and family belonging. But if he looks within, Jacob must admit that he sold all of this more cheaply than Esau sold his birthright. Stupidity brings loss to Esau, but the losses through cheating and swindle are deeper. Much better for the entire family, had Jacob given due honor to his older, firstborn brother. Two dissimilar twins—one guilty only of stupidity; the other of cheating family.

In Laban also, Jacob sees his exact self—a cold-hearted, calculating cheat who regards all those around him (even family) as dupes to be manipulated for his own enrichment. This exact *modus operandi* was seen first in Jacob. Shrewdness brings increase (wives, sheep, children), but that highly-skilled cheating marks each as just another greedy rat. Rather than emulate Laban—or beat his crooked uncle in a bid for supremacy—Jacob should repent and pursue honorable dealings.

Even in God, Jacob is made to see himself. God always let Jacob win—he was able to outsmart Esau, to outcheat Laban, and to outwrestle God. And it was never because Jacob was at all better than any of them. Someone once said, “Nothing fails like success that is achieved apart from God.” Jacob was content with himself as a highly successful cheat. He even confidently wheeled-and-dealed with God. So, Jacob was given all that he wished for. God would allow Jacob unjust, undeserved gains and an over-inflated ego. However, that balloon was sure to pop! Jacob should have deferred before God. Looking at God, he should know better than to see Him as his equal, as his twin. If he wrestled and managed to prevail against God, Israel should know that God took a dive and let him win!

God threw the match!

Each of the three “twins” gave Jacob a clear vantage from which to see something of his true self. Yet, even while in his rough state, God showered Jacob with blessings and sent visitations of angels. By no means should Jacob interpret such supernatural gifts from God as signs of approval. They were signs of God’s love and His grace. And the same would apply to the eponymous nation, Israel—for they also would wrestle with God. Like Jacob, they might wrongly interpret centuries of blessings from God as His approval.

This was not about Jacob (nor even the Israelites), after all. God had determined (through grandfather Abraham) to bless the whole world—the entire human family. God would run His purpose through the narrow channel of Jacob/Israel as the long stretch of history unfolded. While this was being worked out, they would be His people and He would be their God. Together, they would wrestle. And the conflict would yield a blessing for the world, and for Israel.

But Israel, to receive the Abrahamic blessings for renewal of the corrupt cosmos, had to undergo their own renewal. They were charged with being the channel of Abrahamic blessing to every family, tribe, and nation—but they proved unfit for the task. John the Baptist saw this:

“You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to

Abraham. Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”

(Luke 3:7–9, NASB).

Paul likewise openly declared the same disqualifying failure of “Jacob” (see Romans 2:1 through 3:20). Jesus also challenged the connection of Israel to Abraham (John 8:31–59). Like their patriarchal namesake, Israel was riddled through with sins that needed cleansing. In this, they were not unlike the pagan nations (Israel’s twins?). God was forced to channel the Abrahamic blessing through His Son. Jesus finished the task that Israel could not.

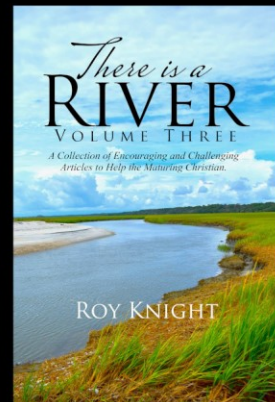
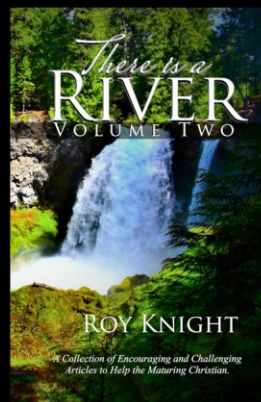
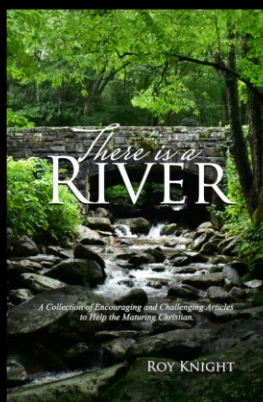
Does God still confront through “twins”?

“Therefore you have no excuse, every one of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”

(Romans 2:1–4).

Can you see yourself in the wrongdoing of others? Is God using look-alikes to confront you with your true self, while you wrestle with God? Do you have an evil twin?

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HOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS Relate to *TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* CHRISTIANS THOU SHALT NOT COVET

Charles R. Rose

This is our final lesson on “How the Ten Commandments Relate to Twenty-First-Century Christians. We now come to Commandment # 10:

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

(Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21)

There are several words in the Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek translated “covet,” “covetous,” and “covetousness.” Basically, to covet *“signifies to desire or long after, in order to enjoy as a property the person or thing coveted”* (Adam Clarke, vol. 1, p. 406). It is a sin of the heart, allowing one’s heart to be set on taking that which rightly belongs to another. In the text of both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, this tenth commandment is broken down into five parts, with the fifth covering anything belonging to another which is not specifically stated.

1. Coveting your neighbor’s house.
2. His wife.
3. His male and female servant.
4. His livestock; ox, donkey etc.
5. Anything belonging to your neighbor.

In our lesson covering commandment number seven we looked at the question of “*who is my*

neighbor?” and determined that it would be any other human being, regardless of location. Also, in that lesson we compared this commandment to our Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:28: “*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” The conclusion one must draw from that comparison is that the thought of “*coveting your neighbor’s wife, man servant and female servant*” is the same as lusting after them.¹

We must also keep in mind that our God never sets double standards in moralities, demanding one thing of males and another of females. Thus, for a woman to lust after a man is the same thought in reverse. I am convinced that far too often our ladies and young ladies, and even men and boys inadvertently cause lust from the opposite sex by the way they dress and/or act. I am convinced that the way one dresses has a bearing on this subject. You parents and grandparents of young children; think for a moment of how you allow your children to dress in public. Are they covered decently as commanded in 1 Timothy 2:9; “*in modest apparel,*” or are they

¹ When the OT was translated into Greek, they used the same Greek word for “covet” in the 10 Commandments that Jesus used for “lust” in Matthew 5:28.

wearing clothing that is either revealing, or shows too much flesh? Again, God doesn't have a double standard. If women and girls are to dress modestly, so must men and boys.

What are your thoughts when you turn on the news and hear of those "predators" searching for young girls and boys to molest? Who are they more likely to lust after and try to entrap, girls dressed in short shorts and revealing shirts and dresses or one who is dressed modestly? Over the past two years how many news stories have we watched as they reported someone being arrested because they thought they were meeting a 12 or 13 year-old girl they had met on the internet when in reality it was an undercover police officer. And for each one caught how many others go undetected? We really don't know the type of people who are around us every day. You can't tell by the way they dress, or where they are employed. Take the same two-year time period and news broadcasts mentioned above: How many times in the state of Missouri (where I live) have they reported a school teacher, male and female, being arrested for taking advantage of a young student sexually? I went on the internet Saturday, September 21st, 2019 and checked for registered sex offenders in the county and town where I live. There are 82 registered sex offenders in Benton County, Missouri with nine having addresses in my hometown. THIS IS ALARMING! BUT IF YOU LOOK INTO THE WORD OF GOD, IT FALLS UNDER THE TENTH COMMANDMENT, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant...*" To covet is to lust after—and for anyone, male or female, to dress in such a way that would elicit such thoughts from another is breaking God's commandment of modest dress, and casting a stumbling block in front of their neighbor.

Our penal system knows these things about proper dress, and if you visit a prison you will learn very quickly that dress-codes are strictly enforced. EXAMPLE: Our nephew and niece adopted a boy who was constantly in trouble. Eventually he was incarcerated. When they visited him in prison the

female visitors had to have their shoulders and upper arms covered, and no low-cut tops, no shorts or miniskirts. If ladies visiting did not have such, she was ordered to wear a prison shirt or be refused entrance.

So there are two very good reasons for teaching our children and grandchildren the proper and godly way to dress modestly. (1). It is for their physical safety, to keep them from the sexual perverts who are out there. (2). But more than that, it is sinful to dress in a way that causes someone to lust for them.

Let us turn our attention to the command against coveting your neighbor's house and other property. Often times in scripture a man's house signifies his family, such as when "*the Lord said to Noah, Come into the ark, you and all your house...*" (Genesis 7:1), or when He told Abram to leave his father's house (Genesis 12:1). However, it is most probable that "house" in our text speaks of the dwelling place and all things within it. Thus, the thought would be to desire, with intent to own by any and all means, the home and/or property of another.

We see this "*intent of the heart*" with Achan when he stole objects belonging to another (Joshua 7:10-26). He said, "*When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them....*"

Covetousness may be described under a number of metaphors. For example:

Covetousness Is Greediness.

Many have been greedy for this world's wealth throughout the history of man. It is greed which causes one to "*covet your neighbor's house.*" Greed has caused covetous men to lie in bed scheming plans to defraud others of the property they covet. This was a most serious offence under the Ten Commandment law. Through Micah God said:

"Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.... They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So

they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance”

(Micah 2:1-2).

Under the NT law of grace we are told that *“those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare...”* (1 Timothy 6:9). The temptation to covet follows this desire for riches. Paul had this thought in mind as he wrote to Timothy. Following the above warning in verse nine, he stated that *“the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows”* (1 Timothy 6:10). Where the New King James has *“strayed from the faith in their greediness”* the King James Version has *“which while some coveted after.”* Covetousness is greediness.

Covetousness Is Selfishness.

James E. Gibbons wrote:

“Paul spoke of the second table of the law being fulfilled by love (Romans 13:9-10). Selfishness is the opposite of love. Covetousness is the absorbing impulse of selfishness. Therefore, if love is the fulfilling of the second table of commandments, covetousness is its converse (the breaking of the table). Paul in Romans 7:7ff it seems, looked upon this commandment as forbidding all improper appetites and desires which are the beginning of all sin that is committed by us.” (“Thoughts On The Ten Commandments,” The Sword And Staff, vol. 28, no. 3.)

Covetousness Is Idolatry

In Colossians 3 we are told to *“set your mind on things above”* and to put out of our lives those earthly things that take our affections away from God. Among those things we are to put away are, *“fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and, covetousness which is idolatry”* (Colossians 3:5). We are told in Ephesians 5:5 that the covetous man is an idolater, *“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of God”*.

This thought of covetousness being idolatry brings us back to the first and second commandments given at Sinai. *“You shall have no other gods before me... You shall not bow down to them nor serve them...”* (Exodus 20:3-5, Deuteronomy 5:8-10). Our God has never allowed, nor will He ever allow, man to place anything in his affections above the one who created him. Yet it is so common today for those who profess to be children of the Most High, to have their entire being (outside of the worship assemblies) consumed in the pursuit of “financial stability.” Many who profess to be Christians today will lie to, and cheat their employers in order to get more. Under the biblical definition of neighbor, would one’s employer not be included? Thus, to lie to, and cheat in this manner is the same as coveting your neighbor’s belongings.

Many who boast of being “members of the church” seem to be incapable of trusting in anything they are unable to see, hear, smell, or taste. In their daily living they have reversed the instructions of 1 Timothy 6:17 where we are told to NOT *“trust in uncertain riches, but (trust) in the Living God”*

In an article by Joe R. Barnett titled “The Least Confessed Sin” I found the following:

“Covetousness says: “You have opportunity to make extra money Sunday. You need it. Don’t go to church.”

Man replies: “Yes Master.”

Covetousness says: You’ll have to compromise your convictions and be a shade dishonest in this business transaction. But that’s business. Everyone’s doing it.”

Man replies: “Yes Master.”

Covetousness says; “Living expenses are high. You deserve a nice vacation. You’ll have to cut your contribution to the church.”

Man replies: “Yes Master.”

Our Lord still commands us to. *“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,”* (Matthew 6:33). He still contrasts the mammon (material riches as idols) with *“the one true and living God,”* and Jesus said, *“you cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matthew 6:24).

As Christians in the twenty-first-century we

must always “*take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist of the things he possesses*” (Luke 12:15). But rather, “*let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

In brother Gibbon’s article, “Thoughts On The Ten Commandments,” he writes:

“Learning to trust God in a life divested of materialism brings contentment. In 1 Timothy Paul warns of those who suppose that gain is godliness. Then he said, ‘But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content’ (1 Timothy 6:5-8). Later in this chapter he instructed them ‘not to trust in riches, but the living God’ (6:17). That was the essence of what the Lord taught in the sermon on the mount when he warned about laying up treasures for ourselves on this earth in contrast with laying up treasures in heaven (i.e., using material things for good. now). He then stated, ‘Ye cannot serve God and mammon.’ The famous lesson about worry follows. After all, mammon (the god of materialism) is not Almighty, and riches are uncertain. Consequently, a life dominated by materialism will be dominated by worry. In contrast to that, Jesus said. ‘But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you’ (cf. Matthew 6:19-34). Therefore he tells us not to worry about tomorrow. And instead of coveting, laying up treasures on earth, and grasping for more, we are laying up treasures in heaven by putting our material things to good use, in good and benevolent causes.”

I LEAVE YOU WITH THESE CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS:

There can be no doubt that nine of the Ten Commandments are spiritual and moral laws which have governed mankind from creation. Never has there been a time when mankind was permitted to wor-

ship other gods (**commandments 1 and 2**). Never in the history of humanity has God allowed His divine name to be taken in vain (**commandment #3**). However, **commandment #4** was a special set of rules and regulations given only to the children of Israel as a reminder that God had brought them out of Egyptian bondage, and was never given to their forefathers (Deuteronomy 5:3). As for **commandment #5**, never have children been allowed by the God of heaven and earth to bring dishonor upon their parents. Why was it wrong for Cain to take the life of Abel except for God’s law against murder (**commandment #6**). Likewise, adultery (**commandment #7**), Stealing (**commandment #8**), lying (**commandment #9**), And covetousness (**commandment #10**), have always been directly opposed to the will of God.

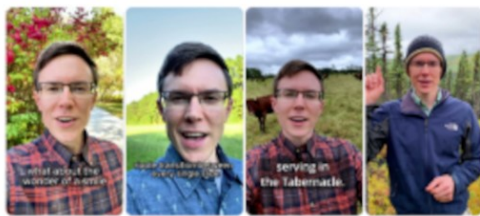
Therefore, nine of the Ten Commandments have been incorporated into Christ’s law of the New Testament and given deeper, spiritual meaning than the “letter of the law” given by Moses at Mount Sinai. Thus, we must look in the New Testament for instructions in salvation through the blood of Christ, and God’s will for us concerning our worship of Him and of the church to which those who obey the gospel of Christ are added (Acts 2:47), and in which we are to serve Him.

Look closely at the commandments of Jesus concerning YOUR salvation. He said, “*If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24). When one fully believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Divine Son of God, he will then be ready to comply with His teachings of Luke 13:3 and 5, “*I tell you ... unless you repent you will all likewise perish*” Jesus further instructed “*Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him I will confess before My Father who is in heaven*” (Matthew 10:32). And if you really believe all He has said you will not hesitate to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins because it was Jesus Himself who first commanded, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:16).

Have you obeyed His commandments?



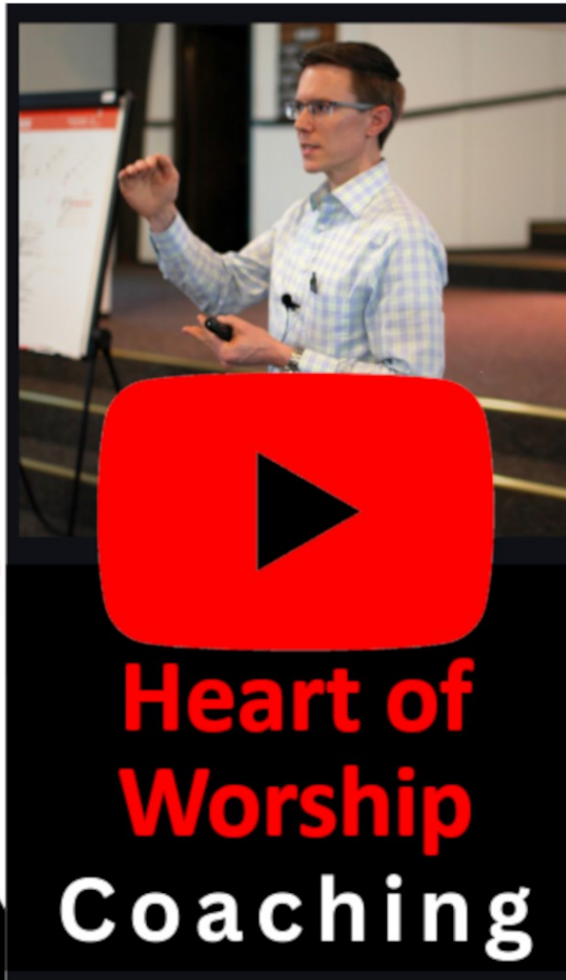
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THE EVOLUTION OF “ADJUSTING” GOD’S MARRIAGE LAW

Hugh Fulford



The Bible doctrine on divorce and remarriage is pretty straightforward and clear. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (fornication, KJV; ASV), causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 5:32).

Later, under question from the Pharisees, Jesus declared: “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (fornication, KJV; ASV), and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). (For the parallels to this passage, see Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18).

By divine inspiration, the apostle Paul wrote: “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man” (Romans 7:2-3). (Note: Paul does not mention the Lord’s “exception” in the preceding text, but he knew that it existed and he understood that it constituted the one and only exception).

In his “Thought For The Day” of April 12, 2022, David Tant called attention to the changing doctrines of the Methodist Church on divorce and how this “evolution” reflects the loosening trend of society in general. His article follows. I ask you to read it carefully, paying special attention to the italicized phrases.

METHODIST DOCTRINE ON DIVORCE

by Jefferson David Tant

The changing doctrines of the Methodist Church on divorce reflect the loosening trends of society in general, as well as losing respect for the Word of God. Following are quotes from the Methodist Discipline over an 88-year period. Which shall we believe and follow, the creeds of men, or the Word of God? This is typical of countless numbers of denominational creeds. (Italics are mine) – JDT

1896

“No divorce, *except for adultery*, shall be regarded by the Church as lawful, and no Minister shall solemnize marriage in any case where there is a divorced wife or husband living; but this rule shall not be applied to the innocent party to a divorce for the cause of adultery, nor to divorced parties seeking to be reunited in marriage.” (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896)

1914

“The Ministers of our Church shall be prohibited from solemnizing the rites of matrimony between divorced persons, except in case of innocent parties who have been divorced for *the one scriptural cause*.” (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1914)

1940

“No Minister shall solemnize the marriage of a divorced person whose wife or husband is living and unmarried; but this rule shall not apply (1) to the innocent person when it is clearly established by competent testimony that the true cause for divorce was adultery *or other vicious conditions* which through mental or

physical cruelty or physical peril invalidated the marriage vow, nor (2) to the divorced persons seeking to be reunited in marriage.” (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church—1940)

1960

“In view of the seriousness with which the Scriptures and the Church regard divorce, a minister may solemnize the marriage of a divorced person only when he has satisfied himself by careful counseling that (a) the divorced person is sufficiently *aware of the factors leading to the failure* of the previous marriage. (b) the divorced person is *sincerely seeking* to make the proposed marriage truly Christian, and (c) *sufficient time has elapsed* for adequate preparation and counseling.” (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church—1960)

1984

“Where marriage partners, even after thoughtful consideration, are estranged beyond reconciliation, we recognize divorce as regrettable, but *recognize the right of divorced persons to remarry*. We express our deep concern for the care and nurture of the children of divorced and/or remarried persons. We encourage that either or both of the divorced parents

be considered for custody of the minor children of the marriage. We encourage an active, *accepting*, and enabling commitment of the church and our society to minister to the members of divorced families.” (The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church—1984).

(Note: Over the years, the Methodist hierarchy apparently “re-studied” what the Bible teaches about there being just one reason for a divorce and a scriptural remarriage, and decided that there are several reasons for such, hf).

David concluded by saying:

“We must ever be vigilant lest we follow the trends of the denominations and society in general. As the world goes farther and farther from God’s teaching, the temptation is to water down the truth so as to avoid offending the world, thus seeking to make the gospel more “attractive” to the worldly-minded. “God forbid” that we should seek to please men rather than God. “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10).

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WHEN GOD'S WORD CEASES TO MATTER

Jim Mitchell

A recently published article dealt with a congregation in Oklahoma City deciding to partner with a mega-community church (see *Christian Chronicle* – Sept. 7, 2023). The senior pastor of that large church (affiliated with the Church of God based out of Anderson, Indiana), is quoted as saying: “*I’ve never been a guy who thought God is wrapped up in doctrine*” and “*We’re not doctrine-driven.*” Later, he stated that differing religious groups can get along when “*You focus on core principles that are not debated.*” While this article will deal with various problems which arise when God’s Word ceases to matter, I want to begin with the three quotations above (which are not that strange within the denominational world) as they raise several issues. We’ll also end with another look at one of these quotations.

Regarding the first statement, since the term “doctrine” (διδάχη–*didache*) refers to “*the activity of teaching, instruction*” and “*the content of teaching,*”¹ the first quote would seem to express the belief that neither content, teaching, nor instruction are really that important to God. Such a

position seems at odds with God giving instructions to Israel at Mt Sinai, or with God ever being upset with anyone for not following His instructions, does it not? Consider also the statement Jesus made about “doctrine.” “*My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me*” (Jn. 7:16). It sounds like, to Jesus, God is interested in doctrine, does it not? Otherwise why bring up the topic of “doctrine” at all?

With the second quote “*We’re not doctrine-driven,*” perhaps “doctrine” was meant to be directed not toward the activity or content of teaching, but of “dogma” (δῶγμα–*dogma*) which is typically translated into English as “ordinance” or “decree.” Since the word “dogma” means “*something that is taught as an established tenet or statement of belief,*”² this quote would seem tantamount to saying they are NOT a group driven by “*established tenet or statement of belief.*” That sort of sounds like building on the sand rather than the rock (Matt. 7:21-27).

What could possibly be the impact of the third “*You focus on core principles that are not debated.*” Such a statement, if true, would ultimately

¹ Danker, Frederick William. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* 3rd edition (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 199.

² *Ibid.* p. 254

make: Jesus guilty of not focusing only on core principles in which everyone already believed (Matt. 15:1-20; 22:15-33; 23:1-39); Paul being either delusional or a false witness (2nd Corinthians 13:10); Peter being seen as ignorant of what he was writing since he attributed the writings of Paul to the realm of Scripture (2nd Pet. 3:16); and would negate the need for the majority of the inspired writings of the New Testament, making them useless. Each of these three statements from this denominational pastor are untenable, and yet such inconsistency with what God's word teaches runs rampant in our world. That being the case, what lessons do we actually find in God's word which show both the futility and error behind those quotes?

The NECESSITY of being FIRMLY ESTABLISHED and STRENGTHENED

No one would knowingly choose a doctor, dentist, mechanic, etc. who was not "established" in their respective field of knowledge. You want people in those (and other areas of expertise) working from knowledge of facts rather than opinion, wishful thinking, or unproven assumptions. However, when it comes to what is the most important area of life – one's relationship with God, the denominational world seems to be filled with a great number of people professing to be followers of Jesus who (either by accident or on purpose) opt for a lack of (or very little) knowledge of and/or compliance with God's word, often merely following what they have heard rather than studying God's word on their own.

Jesus did not put such tremendous effort into His earthly ministry (including the pain and agony of the cross) to provide a way of life void of commitment or principle, and yet that seems to be the basis of the "religion" which is currently being fed to and embraced by millions. There is a prevalent misguided mindset that "love for God" either does not include any responsibility on our part to follow His word, or that it allows us to think what we will about Scripture, even if our conclusions

are totally inconsistent with what Scripture actually teaches. While it should be an obvious contradiction to maintain a love for God while being ignorant and/or disobedient to His word, that erroneous way of thinking has captivated an ambivalent humanity. In the following passages note some of the ways and areas in which Scripture states the child of God is to be strengthened for greater responsibilities and ever greater tasks as the blessings of life continue, even in the midst of obstacles and challenges.

Used slightly over a dozen times in the New Testament, the Greek word (στηρίζω - *steridzo*) is defined as **"to fix firmly in a place, set up, establish, support;... cause to be inwardly firm or committed, confirm, establish, strengthen."**³ Eleven of those passages are listed below with the English translation of that Greek word in bold type. Note not only the varied usage of the term, but the impact these passages have on both the teaching of the New Testament and the desire Christians should have in allowing the word of God to establish and strengthen them in the faith. While comments are offered below regarding some of the usages of forms of this word in the New Testament, other examples in other verses really need no comment other than the context of the text itself.

[Lk. 9:51] PURPOSEFUL ACTION

"Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

Here the term is used to legitimately indicate **purposeful action** on the part of Jesus.⁴ Nothing

³ *Ibid.* p. 945

⁴ The term can be described as "made His face firm...as if to meet something formidable and unwelcome, the cross rather than what lay beyond, here in view." Alexander Balmain Bruce - *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 1 *The Synoptic Gospels*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, 1967) p. 535. Francois Bovon comments that "Jesus' decision was a firm one: the expression "set his face" indicated determination and suggests that

was going to dissuade Jesus from accomplishing the purpose for which He came. Such action on His part was not (nor should it be) relegated to the whim of the moment or the idea that whatever His original purpose for being on earth, He could change that purpose or amend God's plan of redemption to an easier level of commitment on His part.

[Lk. 22:31-32] Continued PURPOSE after GROWTH

*“And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, **strengthen** your brethren.”*

While **purpose** is still involved in this conversation between Jesus and Peter, it is a **purpose that is realized after growth** which is pictured. Peter is admonished “**strengthen** your brethren” when/after “*you have returned*” to Christ. It is not the case that the whims of Peter or his feelings are the basis for his return to Jesus. During this last evening with His disciples, Jesus stated “*If you love me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). There is more to the statement, however, than the return of Peter from the faith which faltered from his following “afar off” to his multiple denial of the Lord. Jesus does not suggest that, for Peter, it is a matter of **if** his faith returns, but **when**. Jesus exhorts Peter to **strengthen** (στήρισον – i.e., establish, strengthen, support) the other disciples after his faith is itself strengthened.

Jesus was to face up to his destiny, even to the point of accepting the unjustified suffering that was a part of it (cf. Isa 50:6-7).” Hermemia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Luke vol. 2 (Fortress Press, 2013) p. 6. Luke Timothy Johnson states that the Greek literally means “*he hardened his face to go*” - *Sacra Pagina – The Gospel of Luke* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1991) p. 162

[Rom. 1:11-12] ESTABLISHED in MUTUAL FAITH and ENCOURAGEMENT

*“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be **established**—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

While faith should grow through one's own study of God's word, it can and is strengthened when it is connected in a “mutual” way with similar faith in others (i.e., “one another”) and built upon the common foundation of God's Word. Such a comment presupposes the underlying agreement of what is believed and practiced in their faith by both Paul and the Christians in Rome. Faith is strengthened when we determine to mutually follow what God's word teaches. “Faith” which is based upon what we want Scripture to say or what we feel Scripture might mean is not really faith in God's word, but faith in ourselves.

[Rom. 16:25-27] ESTABLISHED in the GOSPEL

*“Now to Him who is able to **establish** you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures **made known to all nations**,...*

God is identified as the one “who is able to establish” the Christians in Rome through the good news and preaching of Jesus. The force of Paul's wording carries with it more than just making their faith “permanently firm”⁵ according to that Gospel message. By stating that this message was “made known to all nations” Paul affirms the uniformity of the message presented. Congregations were therefore established and strengthened not with a message that shifted and changed with the differences in local culture, but with a message which was universal in what it taught, teaching

⁵ cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 928.

what was necessary in pleasing God and what God demanded in return.

[1st Thess. 3:1-3] ESTABLISHED and ENCOURAGED concerning you FAITH

*“Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and your fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to **establish you and encourage you concerning your faith**, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we were appointed to this,...”*

[1st Thess. 3:12-13] ESTABLISHED BLAMELESS in HOLINESS

*“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may **establish your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

[2nd Thess. 2:16-17] ESTABLISHED in EVERY GOOD WORD and WORK

*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and **establish you in every good word and work.***

[2nd Thess. 3:3] ESTABLISH and GUARD You

*“But the Lord is faithful, who will **establish you and guard you from the evil one.***

[James 5:8] ESTABLISHED HEARTS

*“You also be patient. **Establish your hearts**, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

[1st Pet. 5:10] ESTABLISHED in a way which is COMPLETE/PERFECT and SETTLED

*“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, **perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.***

[2nd Pet. 1:12] ESTABLISHED in TRUTH

“For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though

*you know them and are **established in the present truth.***

The SIGNIFICANCE of SCRIPTURE

After dealing with the need to be **grounded, established**, and **strengthened** as a child of God, what is the source that allows such confirmation of faith to become reality? While the answer to such a question should seem axiomatic to every student of God’s word, it is surprising how many professed believers do not seem to regard His word as the ultimate authority in either matters of faith and practice or for life itself. The word translated “**Scripture**” (γραφῆ—*graphe*) is used in the New Testament a little over fifty times,⁶ with Paul actually using it slightly more than any other inspired New Testament writer. We live in a time when the point of view often expressed is that what Scripture says is often less important than what one might think or feel it says. Thus, much of humanity views Christianity (and the role of God’s Word) in ways never tolerated elsewhere in life where certainty and specific details are viewed as being vital in reaching appropriate conclusions. Notice some of ways in which Paul uses the word “**scripture**” in his letter to the Christians in Rome and the way that usage can apply to Christians today. Once again, comments are made in connection with only some of the following passages.

⁶ The word translated “scripture” in the New Testament is the word **graphe** (γραφῆ), and while it “is a noun with the underlying sense of ‘writing,’ ... in the fifty or so occurrences of the term, it refers almost exclusively to ‘Scripture(s),’ or the sacred, canonical writings of the old covenant people of Israel. In at least one place, graphe also refers to the unique canonical authority of the New Testament ‘Scriptures.’” **Expository Dictionary of Bible Words**, Stephen D. Renn, ed. (2005) p. 860. In the Greek-English Lexicon edited by Frederick William Danker, it is stated that the word, as used in the New Testament, refers to “sacred scripture. . . exclusively” **Greek-English Lexicon**, Frederick William Danker, ed. (1979) page 206.

[Rom. 1:2] SCRIPTURE and PREDICTION

*“...promised before through His prophets in the Holy **Scriptures**,...”*

Whether dealing with the first Messianic prophecy in Scripture (Gen. 3:14-15), God’s promises to Abraham (Gen. 12 and 15), or the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24; Mark 13; and Luke 21); the predictive nature of Scripture is not only obvious, but significant.

[Rom. 4:3] SCRIPTURE and the POINT to be made

*“For what does the **Scripture** say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

It is SCRIPTURE which gives validation to the point Paul here makes. Abraham *“trusted in God to bring to pass what he had promised. He accepted God’s promise as completely trustworthy and lived his life with confidence in God as the grantor [sic] of unmerited blessings. His pride in self-attainments was transformed into gratitude for God’s gifts . . . “and it was reckoned (logizomai) to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).⁷*

[Rom. 9:17] SCRIPTURE and PURPOSE

*“For the **Scripture** says to the Pharaoh, “**For this very purpose** I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”“*

[Rom. 10:11] SCRIPTURE and PRINCIPLE

*“For the **Scripture** says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”*

[Rom. 11:2] SCRIPTURE and PROMISE

*“**God has not cast away His people** whom He foreknew, Or do you not know what the **Scripture** says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel,...”*

⁷ Richard A. Batey, *The Living Word Commentary: The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, Everett Ferguson, ed. (R. B. Sweet Co., 1969), p. 56.

[Rom. 15:4] SCRIPTURE and PREPARATION

*“For whatever things were **written before** were written **for our learning**, that we through the patience and comfort of the **Scriptures** might have hope.”*

[Rom. 16:25-27] SCRIPTURE and PROCLAMATION

*“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic **Scriptures** made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith** – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”*

The VITAL IMPORTANCE of TRUTH

What Scripture says about TRUTH is an especially timely topic in view of a recent book some congregations have been reading which states, among other things, that *“Truth is a squirmy little thing.”⁸* That a member of the Lord’s church could write such a thing is almost inconceivable. Was the author suggesting that God was either incapable or unwilling to provide something which could be understood? Was providing an understandable message not God’s intent as evidenced throughout His word? The writer of the above quote seems to think such is the case by later stating – *“Scripture is notoriously resistant to everyone interpreting the Bible the same.”⁹* That raises another question. Is truth so evasive and Scripture so resistant to being understood that God purposefully creates confusion in His Word among those who desire to be His people? What is truly ironic is that some of

⁸ Jack R. Reese, *At The BLUE HOLE*, (Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), p.131.

⁹ Reese, p. 177. With such a position against the Word of God being able to be understood, perhaps it is no wonder that not long after an Oklahoma City congregation studied this book (*At the BLUE HOLE*), it joined in fellowship with a large denomination church – even deeding their property to that church.

these people, who believe humanity cannot ever agree on what the Bible says, are the people who talk repeatedly about being “united.” United upon what?

Paul instructed the Christians in Thessalonica to – “**test** (δοκιμάζετε - *dokimazete*) all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21 NKJV). Christians in Corinth were told to “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified*” (2 Cor. 13:5). Christians in Galatia were admonished, “let each one **examine** (δοκιμάζω - *dokimazeto*) his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Gal. 6:4). Jesus used a form of that same word (δοκιμάζειν - *dokimazein*) when He asked “you can **discern** the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not **discern** this time?” (Luke 12:56).

Since John uses the Greek word for “truth” more than any other inspired writer in the New Testament, what lessons can be learned about “truth” from what those writings contain? For example, John 8:32 is an oft-quoted verse concerning “truth” but, in reality, verse 32 is only part of the thought being expressed. The more complete thought is found in verses 30-32.

“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”“

ABIDING in God’s word is vital to truly understanding and being made free by truth. Actually, that is the only way the concept can rationally be understood. Truth on any issue cannot provide freedom if one is not willing to embrace and abide within the realm of the details that truth unfolds. If that were not the case, one would not actually believe the truth one claimed to embrace, would they? Note that the phrase “**he who does the**

truth” in the conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus makes the same point as what is mentioned above from the context of John 8:30-32.

[John 3:19-21] TRUTH and ACTION

*“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But **he who does the truth** comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*

[John 4:23-24] TRUTH and WORSHIP

*“...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and **truth**; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in **truth**.”*

If Jesus had said worship in Spirit and with feeling (rather than Spirit and truth) the passage would align with the prevailing concept within our religious world as “truth” seems to be given a back seat to feeling and emotion. Unfortunately for modern Christendom, Jesus did not say that our worship must be based upon feeling, but upon truth. Jesus was not being legalistic in that statement, just stating fact (i.e., “truth”).

[John 5:33] TRUTH and VERIFICATION

*“You have sent to John, and he has **borne witness to the truth**.”*

Perhaps the term “validation” could have been used here just as easily as “verification” (see also John 1:29-34). Who Jesus really is was not a secret. What He is proclaiming are not empty ramblings, but both embody and expand the Word of God and are a fulfillment of prophecies Israel had been given centuries earlier. John bore witness to the TRUTH, not to feeling or wishful thinking.

[John 17:17] TRUTH and GOD'S WORD

*“Sanctify them by **Your truth**. Your word is truth.”*

[1st John 1:6; 2:4-5] TRUTH and PRACTICE

*[1:6] “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we **lie and do not practice the truth**.” [2:4-5] “He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and **the truth is not in him**. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”*

[1st John 2:21] TRUTH and KNOWLEDGE

*“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that **no lie is of the truth**.”*

[1st John 3:18] TRUTH and LOVE

*“My little children, let us not **love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth**.”*

Where “PATTERN” meets “DOCTRINE”

A popular teaching within our modern religious world is the premise that it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. However, if something is believed or done which is wrong, does it matter whether that error was made in sincerity or not? Would such a position be accepted in any other area of society? Is the modern religious world correct in fostering the belief that no real PATTERN for Christianity exists in God's Word?

In Romans chapter ten, Paul wrote *“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God”* (Rom. 10:1-3). Notice what Paul states. Paul knew there were those who placed more value on their “zeal” than on “knowledge.” In fact, before he became a Christian, Paul fell into that same category. Concerning his back-

ground, he previously viewed himself as *“a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”* (Phil. 3:5b, 6). To Timothy, Paul described himself as *“formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man;”* stating that he *“did it ignorantly in unbelief”* (1 Tim. 1:13). The fact that Paul was sincere when he was persecuting Christians does not alter the fact that he was wrong (sincerely wrong) in so doing.

We live in a time when there are those who believe God never left us any type of “pattern” to follow in service to Christ, but that those sincerely believing and practicing diverse and contradictory things regarding Christ and His church are still totally acceptable in God's sight. Is that correct? Is there no “pattern” or “teaching” (doctrine) laid out in God's word? Is everyone free to sincerely do as they please or to believe whatever they desire to be true and still be counted as faithful?

Actually, the word for *“pattern”* (τυπου—*tupous*) is used around a dozen times in the New Testament in a variety of ways. For example, it describes the *pattern* or *imprint* left by the nails in the hands of Jesus (John 20:25). Were those scars in His hands indistinguishable from any and all other types of scars, or did they contain details that distanced them from other scars? The word is used regarding the *pattern, form, or “manner”* in which a letter was written to keep Paul safe after he was taken into custody by the Roman guard (Acts 23:25). It is used to describe the *pattern* (or *example*) the Thessalonian Christians had become to all Greece in the way they shared the Gospel with the lost (1 Thessalonians 1:7), and the way Titus was instructed to be a *“pattern of good works”* as he encouraged those around him (Titus 2:6-8). It describes the instructions given to Moses concerning the Tabernacle to *“make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain”* (Hebrews 8:5), yet with such variety of examples of its usage as listed above, we are told by

some academic theologians within the church that Christianity never was meant to be directed by any sort of “pattern.”

When Jesus stated “*If you love me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15) it seems very much implied, does it not, that He has given us instructions to follow rather than just leaving it up to us to determine what we will or will not do in His name. In His question “*But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?*” (Luke 6:46), He doesn’t seem to allow the idea that we can do anything and everything we want as long as we still say we love Him, does He?

Sometimes, in religious discussions, the response to comments such as those above is that much of what the church teaches comes not from what Jesus said, but from the other books in the New Testament with the statement that while we need to follow Jesus – we don’t need to listen to Paul, James, Peter, or Jude. While such an idea may be very sincere, is it sincerely correct or wrong? When Jesus met with the twelve for that final meal on the night He was betrayed (Mark 14:17), He told them that when He went away “*the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you*” (John 14:26). Perhaps it should be asked, whether or not everything Jesus taught was recorded for us in Scripture. The answer to such an inquiry is NO. For example, during the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7, Jesus taught in the temple, but we are not given an account of what He said (John 7:14-15). John even tells us that Jesus did many things which were not recorded (John 20:30-31). Teaching found in the New Testament after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John should neither be discounted nor overlooked.

Turning our discussion to the topic of doctrine, the word (διδάχῃ—*didache*) seems to be used in a variety of ways, but referring literally to teaching and instruction. One place where the connection of “pattern” to “doctrine” is seen is in Paul’s letter to

Christians in Rome.

*“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. But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that **form**” (the word for pattern, JM) “of **doctrine** (διδάχης) to which you were delivered, and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness”*

(Romans 6:16-18).

[Mk. 1:21-22; 4:2] CONSISTENT TEACHING

*[1:21-22] “Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and **taught**. And they were astonished at His **teaching**, for He **taught** them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” [4:2] “Then He **taught** them many things in parables, and said to them in His **teaching**,...”*

The above passages each use both the verb (i.e., “taught”) and noun forms (i.e., “teaching”) of the word for “doctrine.” The concept of a consistent “pattern” is necessarily implied in the teaching (“doctrine”) of Jesus otherwise one would be forced to conclude that the teaching of Jesus varied and contradicted itself as He went from place to place, teaching different things to different people. Using our Lord’s usage as an example, how were early Christians admonished to be mindful of and utilize “**patterns**” and how should we respond to “**form**,” “**pattern**,” and “**manner**” in our walk with God? While the idea of “form” and “pattern” is recognized as vital in every other discipline of study from mathematics to language, it is vital that it not be ignored here. It is consistent “doctrine” (i.e., doctrine according to forms and patterns) that is mentioned in Scripture.

[1st Tim. 1:3] COMMITTED TEACHING

*“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach **no other doctrine**,...”*

In this reminder from Paul to Timothy while he was in Ephesus, the commitment to what needs to be taught is mentioned in no uncertain terms. Deviation from what the Christians in Ephesus had been taught was not acceptable. Teaching any other doctrine than what they had received was not acceptable then, and it is not acceptable now.

[1st Tim. 1:10] BEWARE CONTRARY DOCTRINE

As Paul's opening remarks to Timothy continue, he states that some have "*strayed, have turned aside to idle talk*" (1:6) because they were "*desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm*" (1:7). Ultimately, after a list including things such as *lawless, insubordinate, the ungodly and sinners* (1:9), Paul warns Timothy to beware of "***any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust***" (1:10b, 11).

If doctrine was so fluid that it could acceptably change from culture to culture or century to century, then Paul's warning to Timothy was false. The idea that any denomination which truly loved God is acceptable to God no matter what they teach is the type of wishful thinking that is NOT supported by what is found in the Word of the God they claim to love.

[Eph. 4:14] Do NOT BE CARRIED AWAY

"...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."

When some Christians in Galatia were endeavoring to create a hybrid form of Christianity by melding the law of Moses with the gospel of Christ, was such an action acceptable to God – even if they meant well and were very sincere in their intent? When some in Colosse were being

enticed to worship angelic beings as intermediaries between God and Humanity – were they correct? When those in Thessalonica were exposed to the idea that if you were not physically alive at the return of Christ you missed out on eternity – were they right? Early congregations were indeed bombarded with erroneous doctrines. Whether or not they were fabricated out of craftiness, deceit, or sincerity did not matter – they were wrong. The admonition/warning to Christians rings just as loudly today as in the first century. Do NOT be carried away with erroneous teaching.

[Rom. 16:17-18] Be CAREFUL to AVOID THINGS

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."

It is obvious from what is written in this passage that to go beyond what is found in God's Word is to place one's soul in eternal jeopardy, regardless of whether such disobedience was done out of ignorance or a belief that "doctrine" really isn't that significant. (Remember the quote from the denominational preacher that was mentioned at the beginning of this article? "*We're not doctrine-driven.*") Whether well-meaning or not, such counterfeit doctrines cannot be followed with God's approval.

OBEDIENCE and 1st CENTURY CHRISTIANS

We now live in a culture in which evidence, fact (truth), and proof take a backseat to feeling, opinion and unverifiable assumption. While "obedience" may not be a very popular subject, its demise in culture has led to the rise of ambivalence toward the idea of right and wrong. All around us we are seeing positions taken in many areas of society which are based neither upon fact nor truth. Such a drought of rational analysis goes

beyond culture and society at large and has plagued Christianity for centuries. Take, for example, our Lord's statement in Matthew 16:18 concerning the confession made by Peter that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (16:16). In verse 18 Jesus said *"...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* Is it in any way conceivable that by the designation *"My church"* Jesus meant He would welcome and be pleased with hundreds and hundreds of differing religious "denominations" with hundreds of conflicting teachings between them?

Jesus prayed in John 17 that His disciples *"may be one"* (17:11) and further expanded that thought and subject in later verses.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will 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, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (17:20-23).

In reality, there is no place within the pages of God's Word where it is taught that what someone believes really doesn't matter as long as we love God and love Jesus. There is a tremendous problem with such inconsistency. Jesus said, *"if you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15) and then mentioned it again in John 15:10 – a chapter where He repeatedly said *"abide in Me."* That being the case, how could it even be possible to love God and Jesus and remain either clueless or disobedient to what the word of God teaches? How were first-century Christians to deal with "obedience" and what were they to "obey"? The following passages provide some answers to that question.

Their Obedience was:

[2nd Cor. 7:14b, 15] CORRECTIONAL OBEDIENCE

*"...as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as **he remembers the obedience of you all**, how with fear and trembling you received him."*

The first letter to Christians in Corinth dealt with a host of problems which needed to be corrected. By the writing of the second letter, those Christians had worked diligently to change from either following or allowing error to striving to be obedient in these matters. Their obedience was very much corrective in nature.

[2nd Cor. 10:4-5] CONTINUAL OBEDIENCE

*"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 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.**"*

[Rom. 1:5] UNIVERSAL OBEDIENCE

*"Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith among all nations** for his name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;"*

[Rom. 15:18] EXPERIENTIAL OBEDIENCE

*"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, **to make the Gentiles obedient** -"*

Here Paul states the need to live obediently in such a way that God's word changes us. It would be extremely hard, if not impossible, to influence others to follow something which you have not personally embraced. Keep in mind there is a tremendous difference between *'this is what I think, feel, or even believe'* versus *'this is what God's word says.'*

[Rom. 16:19] NOTABLE OBEDIENCE

*"For your **obedience has become known to all**. Therefore I am glad on your behalf;*

but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple” (or innocent, JM) “concerning evil.”

[Rom. 16:25-27] PURPOSEFUL OBEDIENCE

*“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God **for obedience to the faith** – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”*

In light of the significance of being obedient to God’s Word we, like those first century Christians, need to be:

[1st Pet. 1:14] OBEDIENT CHILDREN

*“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; **as obedient children**, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,”*

[1st Pet. 1:22] OBEYING the TRUTH

*“Since you have purified your souls in **obeying the truth** through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,”*

The WORD of GOD and UNITY

While the frequency of discussions about religious unity ebbs and flows with whatever seems to change in culture, more often than not the prevalent thought throughout the denominational world is that there is no need to be concerned about what religious groups teach as long as they simply believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the word of God. For a large segment of religious adherents, anything beyond that is often seen as inconsequential.

While Jesus indeed prayed in John 17 for unity

(a passage referenced earlier in this article) exactly what did such unity look like? Does Scripture leave us without an answer to such a question or is it possible that the answers God’s word provides are just not popular in modern religious culture?

Regarding the first question, “**what did...unity look like,**” not only does the teaching of Jesus on unity establish what His desires for that unity are, but letters of the New Testament beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John give additional insights into what Jesus expects concerning unity among people of faith. Concerning the second question “**does scripture leave us without answers,**” Scripture DOES provide answers to what such religious unity should involve and how it should be maintained.

[Jn. 17:17-21] BELIEVE through THEIR WORD

*“Sanctify them by Your truth, Your word is truth. As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. **I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will 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, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”*

[1st Cor. 1:10] NO DIVISIONS among Them

*“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and **that there be no divisions among you**, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

[1st Cor. 4:17] TEACH EVERYWHERE

*“For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, **as I teach everywhere in every church.**”*

What Paul writes will NOT allow the fallacious idea that he taught different things to different groups of people based upon differences in their

cultures. He taught the same message everywhere.

[1st Cor. 11:2] AS DELIVERED

*“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and **keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.**”*

[1st Cor. 14:37] COMMANDMENTS of the LORD

*“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that **the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.**”*

[2nd Thess. 2:15] By WORD or EPISTLE

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”

[1st Tim. 1:3-4] TEACH NO OTHER DOCTRINE

*“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they **teach no other doctrine**, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”*

[2nd Tim. 1:13] HOLD FAST

*“**Hold fast the pattern of sound words** which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”*

I would like to close this article by referring to a comment made on the Christian Chronicle Facebook page in regard to the aforementioned story about the congregation in Oklahoma City partnering with a denominational body. One of the comments (while suggesting that nothing critical should be said about such a merger) asked: “*What ever happened to ‘We are not the only Christians but we are Christians only.’ Or ‘In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love.’ Which were major slogans in the Stone-Campbell movement?*” Unfortunately, some today who refer to this phrase don’t seem to see the irrationality they fall prey to in the way they use it.

“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love” was, is, and always will be

(I believe) a valid principle upon which to focus. The key issue in this case is “In essentials, unity.” That is a problem. The denominational group which the Mayfair Church of Christ in Oklahoma City has decided to “join” is Wesleyan in thought and connected with the non-charismatic “Church of God.” Wesleyan thought and teaching on the subject of salvation, along with the doctrinal teaching and doctrinal statement of the non-charismatic Church of God (headquartered in Anderson, Indiana), opts for an understanding of Scripture which is at odds with every New Testament account of how one becomes a Christian – So on the “in essentials, unity” – that principle is violated already.

I know people who attend Crossings Community Church and I know people who attend the Mayfair Church of Christ (or who have attended Mayfair until recently). Remember the comments made concerning the third statement from the denominational preacher? “*You focus on core principles that are not debated.*” Why would people, who truly love the lord and one another, ever stop divergent doctrines from being discussed in light of Scripture? Should those of various religious backgrounds shy away from deep study into what Scripture says, OR should all of us be determined to follow Scripture wherever it leads? If it is the case that as long as someone is sincere, they are fine—then Paul should NOT have written anything to the Christians in: Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, or Thessalonica should he? I am hopeful that the recent development here in Oklahoma City will result in a tremendous amount of dialogue among many of the faith groups in the city, with the Word of God being wholeheartedly viewed as the final say in teaching and practice.



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4. Students appreciate teachers who treat them as friends, not numbers. We encourage our teachers to develop a friendly relationship with their students. If they desire to become a Christian, we will do our best to connect them with the nearest church of Christ missionary in their region of the world.
5. For more information on all WEI's activities and accomplishments, visit **www.worldenglishinstitute.net**. This site has links to WEI's quarterly newsletter, other newsletters related to mission sites all over the world, teacher tips, and other WEI related links.

We Need Teachers—How to become a WEI Internet Teacher

1. Fill out a teacher application located at: **www.worldenglishinstitute.net**
2. You will receive additional information after you register to become a teacher.
3. Active teachers must go to the Student Board link on the web site. There you will find a list of students waiting to be claimed by a teacher. The list gives student name and number, age, marital status, religion, occupation, and country of residence. Pick any students who interest you.
4. In the beginning, we recommend picking at least 5 students. About half drop out so this gives you a better chance of having at least one active student.
5. After you learn how to operate the website's controls, it takes about 10 minutes to teach both the Bible and English lessons to one student.
6. Help is available via email: **support@worldenglishinstitute.org**

Jesus Told Us to Go...Will You?

You can make a difference in the heart of a soul looking for an opportunity to better their life. You can change their life by helping them to know our amazing, loving Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It only takes a few minutes of your day from the comfort of your home to help someone come to know the Lord, love Him, and obey Him.

Jesus' last command for us before leaving the earth needs to become our first priority.

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

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Roy Knight

When I was young in the early 70's, there was a white section of town and a black section of town—and seldom did the two mix except for work and the grocery store. Though the sections of town by and large have remained the same, there is a different feel about the community.

Often my son and I, who are white, will go to the park to play and often there will be children who are black, Hispanic and even Chinese. To him, outward appearance does not matter nor does it matter to me. The other day as he was see-sawing with a little black boy his age I thought to myself that we certainly have come a long way. Many times, when I am swinging him, other kids will ask me to push them as well. It doesn't matter to them that I am a white guy. All they want to do is swing and to see how high they can go. It is not unusual for me to be swinging three kids at a time.

In the last several years, there have been some horrendous crimes committed based on color and religion. To me that is deeply troublesome. Concerning one's color, the Apostle Paul said in addressing the Athenians in Acts 17:26, "And He [God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth..." Certainly, many of us have been taught from the beginning that we came from Adam and Eve. All people, whether red, yellow, black, or white are descended from these two. Thus, we are all kin and have the same Father who is God. Yes, we are different and have varying backgrounds, but we have the same origin.

I think it is interesting that we appreciate diversity in everything except for the one thing that matters most—the human race. We appreciate that not all flowers are the same. We are thankful that all cats,

dogs, horses, and fish are not the same. We love variety when it comes to food and drinks. Why is it that we love variety except when it comes to people? The Apostle John said in 1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" If we profess to be Christians, we cannot live our lives in a prejudiced manner.

Likewise, when it comes to religion, we need to be mindful of the Apostle Peter who said in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." I am a Christian and I wish everyone were true Christians. Jesus did not command us to send forth His message with a sword. His gospel was to be sent through preaching. The Apostle Paul's letter to Titus said God has, "manifested His word through preaching" (Titus 1:3).

Neither Paul, Peter, nor any of the other Apostles compelled people to accept Christ by threat of violence. Jesus simply said in Matthew 10:14, "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet." As Christians, we cannot be sucked up in this atmosphere of hatred and prejudice. We need to remember the hymn that says, "*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue...*"

Yet while we are here, let us share the precious saving message of Jesus with those to whom He came and died for.

Dealing with ANGER

Adam Cozort



You are mistreated at work by a co-worker who lies about you. What do you do? You are singled out as responsible for something you did not do and are given unfair consequences because of it. What do you do? Your children do that thing you have told them one hundred times not to do, and the consequences for their actions were painful. What do you do?

All these questions and a host of others are scenarios in which we would have a tendency to become angry. Anger, in and of itself, is not wrong. It is an emotion given to us by God that He also possesses. It is as natural to the human psyche as joy, sadness, or humor. Yet, it is also an emotion, like each of the others, with the potential to do great damage if not utilized appropriately.

In the fourth psalm, David writes a prayer calling upon God's help. He knows that God will come to his aid and hear his prayer. Therefore, in the midst of his prayer he puts in place a reminder. It is a reminder designed to cause us to stop and consider how we respond to the situation for which we have asked for the Almighty's help.

David says, "Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still" (4:4). It is easy for our anger to get the best of us. We may often find ourselves saying things we should not, lashing out with actions we later regret, and embittering others with our responses.

David says that our response should be three-fold. First, we are not to sin. Remember, if we are asking for God's help in a matter, we cannot then do those things that would violate His commands and stand between us and Him. Doing so removes His ability to help us and separates us from the source of our help at the same time. It is like the soldier who gets separated from his companions during battle.

He now must face the enemy alone because there is nobody left to help him.

Second, David says to meditate in our hearts and be still. The word for "still," is from the Hebrew word meaning to be silent or hold your peace. For many people, their first reaction when angered is to speak/post/write for all the world to know the reason they are angry and what should be done about it. Instead, the psalmist says we should say nothing. It is unnecessary to regret words that are not spoken, and actions thought in anger that are not performed. However, this response requires generous amounts of self-control.

The third response to anger is found in the next verse, where the king writes, "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord" (4:5). If we want God's help in matters that have angered and hurt us, we need to do what is right and put our trust in the Lord. He will take care of us. Only then can we truly lie down in peace, and sleep (4:8).

While this statement is made in the Old Testament, the very same principle is reiterated in the New Testament in Ephesians 4:26. Thus, the principles of how we deal with anger are the same today as they were in the days of the psalmist. Deal with times of anger wisely, and trust in the Lord to hear you and handle it.



Scan the QR code with your phone and see a short video where Adam goes more in depth on Psalm 4.

THE *Chronological* LIFE OF CHRIST

PART THREE: Why Don't the Genealogies Match?

Bradley S. Cobb

Having examined (at least partially) the *heavenly* existence of Jesus before He was born to Mary, it now behooves us to look into what God was doing to make sure Jesus had an *earthly* existence. And not just *any* earthly existence, but the *right* one.

Fortunately, Matthew and Luke both give us the answer. Unfortunately, they don't give the *same* answer. But both are inspired, so let's examine them and see what we can learn from the two distinctly different genealogies of Jesus, and whether there is any way of reconciling them with each other.

Matthew's Introduction (Matthew 1:1)

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

Matthew's gospel opens with a thesis statement for his readers—Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the one who was promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and the one who was promised to David (2 Samuel 7:4-17).

Matthew was written to a primarily Jewish audience.¹ If Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ (as Matthew affirms in his first verse by calling Him Jesus

Christ), then he was obligated to prove He was of the right pedigree.

Abraham to David (Matthew 1:2-6a)

Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers. Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, and Hezron fathered Ram. Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, and Nahshon fathered Salmon. Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, and Obed fathered Jesse. Jesse fathered David the king.

Matthew gives his Jewish readers a brief reminder of the ancestry of David, starting with Abraham. Nothing here would have given them much surprise, as it all comes straight from Old Testament Scriptures. But as a reminder, he lays it out for them.

Abraham

God promised Abraham that through his seed, all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Paul, when writing to the Galatians, made clear that when God said "seed," he meant "seed." Singular. Not *seeds*, as though this was a reference to the Jewish race, but *seed*, a single individual (Galatians 3:15-18).

¹ See Lesson One for more information on this.

Isaac

Abraham (then still named Abram) complained to God that he had no child, and that his head servant was his heir. God's reply was, "this man will not be your heir, but one whom you father will be your heir" (Genesis 15:4-5). After the fiasco leading to Abraham having a child, Ishmael, with Sarah's servant, God reiterated that His promise was of a *legitimate* son, born to Sarah. That son was Isaac.

God gave Isaac the same promise he gave Abraham: "...in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 26:4b).

Jacob

Jacob and Esau were the only two children (and twins at that) born to Isaac. Thus, the promises God made to Abraham and reiterated to Isaac had to go through one of the two. Jacob manipulated his hungry brother out of his birthright (as Esau was the oldest), and then outright stole the blessing from him (Genesis 27). But he could not steal the promise that God had given to Abraham and Isaac. That was something that was *given* to him knowingly by Isaac and God. Isaac said:

God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful, and multiply you so you may become a multitude of people, and give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your seed with you, that you might inherit the land wherein you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham (Genesis 28:3-4)

And God reiterated it:

God said to him, "Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." And He called his name Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall be from you, kings will come from your loins. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you and to your seed after you" (Genesis 35:11-12).

Judah

Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons, the fourth of

which was Judah. The first three sons (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi) lost the chance at being the seed by their own actions.² Regardless, at the end of Jacob's life, he gave blessings and predictions about each of his children. Judah (whose name means "praise") received this specific blessing:

*Judah, you whom your brethren shall praise. Your hand will be in the neck of your enemies. Your father's children will bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? **The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes shall be red with wine; his teeth white with milk.***

Remember, as part of the reiteration of God's promise to Abraham, God told Jacob, "kings will come through your loins." Jacob now clearly says that promise is going through Judah.

Pharez

Matthew mentions Judah's sons Pharez and Zerah (twins), as well as their mother, Tamar. That whole situation is filled with brokenness, as Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law who pretended to be a prostitute to get him to impregnate her.³ We aren't told specifically which child the promise would go through, but we are definitely given a hint when Pharez' descendants are named, but Zerah's are not (Genesis 46:12; Numbers 26:20-21).

Hezron, Ram, and Amminidab

Outside of their names, and that they are the next

² Reuben had sex with his father's concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). Levi and Simeon slaughtered the inhabitants of Shechem after the prince of that city raped their sister (Genesis 34). Jacob's final words bears this out (Genesis 49:1-7).

³ The sad and disconcerting story takes place in Genesis 38.

three generations after Pharez, we know very little about three men. Ram's name *only* appears in genealogies—if not for them, we wouldn't even know he existed!

We know one very interesting fact about Amminidab, however. He was the father-in-law of a very famous Israelite—Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, and also Moses' brother (Exodus 6:23).

It is pretty safe to assume that Amminidab was considered an important man in the tribe of Judah.

Nahshon

Nahshon was chosen by God to stand with Moses as they began to number the people (Numbers 1:1-4, 7). He was called “captain of the sons of Judah” (Numbers 2:3). He was the official representative of Judah in offering sacrifices to God, called a “prince” by God, and selected to be the first of all Israel to bring the sacrifices and offerings (Numbers 7:10-17).

It is pretty easy to see the promise went through Nahshon.

Salmon

Given who his father was, it is probable that Salmon was well-respected and a leader in Judah. The only fact we know about Salmon (outside of strict genealogical details) is that he married a Canaanite woman—a (former) prostitute named Rahab. We can presume from this that Salmon was not racist, and that he understood God's law against intermarriage with Gentiles to be a reference to *heathen* Gentiles, not to Gentiles who wholeheartedly turned to God.

Here we need to bring up an important fact: *the Old Testament doesn't say Salmon was married to Rahab*. Matthew is the *only* biblical writer to mention this fact. But this *had* to be something the Jews already knew (via tradition, at the very least), oth-

erwise Matthew damages his own credibility by seeming to make up something, inserting a new name—and a *Gentile* at that—into the story that really doesn't help his cause any.

But why insert this name? Ah, that is a great question. I tend to think Matthew's inclusion of Rahab (a *Canaanite*) and Ruth (a *Moabite*), and the wife of Uriah (he a *Hittite*, and it is assumed his wife, Bathsheba, was a Gentile as well) is to show the Jewish readers their Messiah—whether they agreed it was Jesus or not—was not a pureblood Jew. He had at least three known Gentile ancestors.

And it is a subtle way of hinting that God was willing to accept the Gentiles—something which Jesus explicitly states at the end of Matthew's gospel

*Amminidab is not only an ancestor of
Jesus, but also an ancestor of every
Israelite priest in history!*

(Matthew 28:18-20).

As Salmon is the only named son of Nahshon, the Jews would (rightly) assume the seed promise goes through him.

Boaz

Boaz first appears as a wealthy, older man who is very caring. And like his father, he does not view all non-Jews as filthy, unclean enemies. He is not just willing to marry Ruth, a Moabite widow, but announces it publicly before the city leaders, even though he risks another man taking her by doing so.⁴

As Boaz is the only named son of Salmon, the Jews would (rightly) assume the seed promise goes through him.

Obed

We know nothing about Obed, except for where he fits in the genealogical line. But as he is the only named son of Boaz, the Jews would (rightly) as-

⁴ Read the short book of Ruth for the details.

sume the seed promise goes through him.

Jesse

As the only named son of Obed, Matthew's Jewish readers would (rightly) assume the seed promise went through him. Outside of being a shepherd, and being a father of several sons, nothing else is known about him.

David

David was the youngest son of Jesse, but the one whom God chose to be king after Saul, because David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14; 16:7, 11-13). God promised Jacob kings would come from him. Jacob prophesied "the scepter shall not depart from Judah." And now we finally have the first king from the line of Judah. Therefore it is abundantly clear that the promise to Abraham goes through David.

God promised David:

"When your days are complete and you are buried with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Through this promise, God made it clear His promise to Abraham went through David, and through the royal descendants who would rule on the throne.

Solomon through Jechoniah (Matthew 1:6b-11)

Matthew breaks down his genealogy into three sections (Abraham to David; David to the captivity; the captivity to Jesus—see Matthew 1:17). And

since we've already discussed David, let's move on to his son.

David fathered Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, and Abijah fathered Asa. Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, and Joram fathered Uzziah. Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, and Ahaz fathered Hezekiah. Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, and Amon fathered Josiah. Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Solomon

The man with the most wisdom in the Old Testament almost didn't become king. In fact, his very existence *should not have happened*. David basically raped a married woman, got her pregnant, tried to hide what he did by having her husband come back from war (but he refused to go home when his fellow-soldiers were still fighting), then finally ordered her husband's death, then married her. To say David sinned with Bathsheba seems to cheapen the word "sin."

As a side note, I find it interesting that Matthew does not name Bathsheba, but calls her "she who had been the wife of Uriah." Why he did this is speculation. But I tend to think he put this in as a reminder that David was a sinner, a man who—had the Law of Moses been followed—should have been stoned to death by the faithful. This man was the standard for all Israelite kings going forward, but he was anything but perfect. This subtle reminder comes into play when Matthew shows Jesus *overcoming* temptation by *truly* having the word of God hidden in his heart (see what David said in Psalm 119:11).

It is from this should-never-have-happened marriage that Solomon was born. Near David's death, another of his sons tried to take the throne. It took a deathbed pronouncement from David to seat Solomon (then quite young) on the throne.

God appeared to Solomon, asking him to make a request. Solomon didn't ask for money or fame, but

for wisdom and understanding so he could rule well and judge rightly (1 Kings 3:5-9). While Solomon had wisdom and understanding, and could apply it well to the people, he didn't apply it to himself. Like Salmon and Boaz, Solomon was not racist. Unlike Salmon and Boaz, Solomon didn't care about the religious convictions of his wife—oops, I mean *wives* (700 of them, not counting his concubines). He let his wives (Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Zidonians, Hittites, and Egyptians) lead him into worship of false gods—and Solomon even built temples to these gods *in Jerusalem!*⁵

Rehoboam

Rehoboam was a prideful young man who refused to listen to the counsel of the older, wiser counsellors who said *Lower the taxes, and the people will be with you*. Instead, he listened to his ignorant friends who told him to *Raise the taxes and show them you (as the government) are in charge!* Because of this, the kingdom of Israel split, leaving Rehoboam with just two tribes under his authority: Judah and Benjamin.

Abijam

Abijam's reign was short (three years), and he was wicked. But, because of God's promise to David, the line was not cut off—showing the promise was still remembered by God, and was still going through the royal line.⁶

Asa

Asa reigned longer than Saul, David, or Solomon. He reigned 41 years, and started out well. He removed the sodomites from the land, destroyed the idols his fathers (which would include Solomon) had made, and even removed his mother from a place of power because she had made an idol. But when the northern kingdom of Israel erected a blockade against him, he took treasures from the temple and sent them to Syria to buy their help—

instead of seeking help from the Lord. God sent a prophet to Asa to chastise him for not relying on God—so Asa threw him in prison. Then in his 39th year as king, he got a painful disease in his feet, but refused to ask God for help, replying only on doctors.

But God apparently had mercy on him and gave him grace, for we are told, “Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days” (1 Kings 15:14) and “[Jehoshaphat] walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 20:32).

Jehoshaphat

Surprisingly, there is a lot written about Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles, extolling his faithfulness to the LORD. My personal favorite statement is: “his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 17:6). He organized a kingdom-wide *Back-to-God* movement, sending princes and Levites across the nation of Judah to read and explain the Law of Moses to the people (2 Chronicles 17:7-10). These reforms caused Judah to gain great power and prestige and peace.

It is interesting that we are only told of one thing that displeased the LORD. And it *wasn't* that he teamed up with the super-wicked king Ahab to go to battle against Syria. It was that he joined himself with Ahaziah (Ahab's son) to make ships to go get gold. It was because of Ahaziah's wickedness, and Jehoshaphat's willingness to still work with him that the ships were destroyed—neither of them prospered in that venture.⁷

Jehoram

Jehoram was the firstborn son of Jehoshaphat, but he did not follow his father's example. After taking the throne, he murdered all of his brothers. He then married Ahab's daughter, built new high places of pagan worship, and “he wrought that

⁵ 1 Kings 11:1-8.

⁶ 1 Kings 15:1-5.

⁷ 2 Chronicles 20:35-37; 1 Kings 22:48.

which was evil in the sight of the LORD.”⁸

It was so bad that God sent Elijah (who normally just worked in the northern kingdom of Israel) to tell him off and prophecy bad things for him.

Thus says the LORD God of David your father, “Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, nor in the ways of Asa, king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and have also murdered your brothers of your father’s house, who were all better than you—Behold, the LORD will smite the people, and your children, and your wives, and all your possessions with a great plague. And you will have great sickness because of a bowel disease, until your bowels fall out because of the sickness, day by day.”

All the enemies Jehoshaphat had put down started to rise up, and God smacked Jehoram with an incurable bowel disease that lasted two years.

But you want to know how awful Jehoram was? Check this out:

So he died of horrible diseases. And his people made no fire for him like they did for his fathers. He was 32 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eight years, and departed with no one’s regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not with the kings (2 Chronicles 21:19-20).

But even with all this, “the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant he had made with David, and because He promised to give a light to him and to his sons forever” (2 Chronicles 21:7).

The Missing Kings...

It is guessed that Matthew was trying to make things easy to memorize, by dividing the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus into three groups of 14. But by doing so, he had to skip some of the rulers of

Judah. It’s important to note that he isn’t saying these people didn’t exist. But as his readers would have already known their history, he could easily skip some generations and the point would still be made: The promised King came through this line. They knew that Uzziah was the great-great grandson of Jehoram.

In case you’re curious, Matthew skipped Ahaziah (a wicked king who died after a year in power), Athaliah (Ahaziah’s mom, who tried to kill off all the royal seed so she would have no challengers to the throne), Joash (the kid who became king after the priests killed Athaliah—he started off good, but his story is heart-breakingly bad at the end), and Amaziah (who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart,” 2 Chronicles 25:2).

Uzziah

Uzziah started reigning at 16 years old, and “did that which was right in the sight of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 26:4). Zechariah the prophet was a very positive influence on the young king (who reigned a massive 51 years). His reign was marked by faithfulness to God and victory over Judah’s enemies. Until Uzziah got too big for his britches. He let the victories and the blessings from God go to his head.

I think (note: that means this is my *opinion*) Uzziah, out of gratitude and a heartfelt desire to show God praise, did what got him in trouble. He went into the temple, because he wanted to *personally* offer incense to God on the altar of incense—inside the temple. Azariah the priest, along with 80 warrior-priests, went in to stop him. They pointed out to him, *You aren’t authorized by God to burn incense to the LORD. Only the consecrated priests are.*⁹

As a result of his presumptuous worship (doing what God had not authorized), he was stricken with leprosy all the way to his head, and was “thrust out” by the priests. He died as a leper.

⁸ 2 Chronicles 21:6

⁹ 2 Chronicles 23:17-18.

Jotham

Jotham only reigned 16 years (dying at age 41), but was faithful to God. I love how the writer of 2 Chronicles puts it:

And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did, except he didn't enter into the temple of the LORD... Jotham became mighty because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God (2 Chronicles 27:2, 6).

Ahaz

Ahaz was a wicked king who built new idols, sacrificed to false gods, and even burnt his children alive in pagan sacrifices (2 Chronicles 28:1-4). Under his reign, Judah was subjugated to Israel, got whipped by Edom, invaded by the Philistines, and when he tried to get Assyria to help (with a large cash bribe), they came and distressed Judah instead. (2 Chronicles 28:16-21). Even in the face of all this, he refused to turn to the LORD, instead going after the gods of Syria (2 Chronicle 28:22-23).

Hezekiah

Hezekiah made great reforms in Judah, destroying the pagan shrines and altars, and pushed people to worship the one true God. In the midst of an Assyrian invasion, he trusted in God and prayed for deliverance, which God granted. He restored proper worship at the temple, and caused the people to once again celebrate the Passover.

After several years, Hezekiah became sick, and was told by Isaiah that it was terminal. Hezekiah prayed to God, and asked for healing based on his faithfulness to God. His prayer was granted, and Isaiah returned to tell him he had 15 more years of life. During those 15 years, Hezekiah seemed to start taking the LORD for granted. When emissaries from Babylon came to congratulate him on getting well, Hezekiah showed them all the gold and the armory, and took all the credit for the wealth and power of Judah—ignoring God in the process. As a result, God promised (through Isaiah) that Babylon would come wreck Judah and take Hezekiah's de-

scendants captive.¹⁰

Manasseh

If you only read the account in 2 Kings, Manasseh is clearly the most wicked king Judah ever had. Starting from when he became king at age 12, he tried to undo every reform his father had enacted.

[He] did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like the abominations of the heathen, who the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he built the high places again which his father, Hezekiah, had broken down, and he built up idols for Baals, and made Asherim, and worshiped all the hosts of heaven, and served them. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be forever." And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Also, he observed times and used divination, used witchcraft, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritualists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger" (2 Chronicles 33:2-6).

He "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other" (2 Kings 21:16). Because of this, God said:

Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both their ears will tingle. And I will... wipe Jerusalem like a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside-down (2 Kings 21:12-13).

Manasseh was taken captive by Assyrians, who carried him chained to Babylon. But during this time of humiliation and distress, Manasseh finally woke up from his spiritual stupor to see what he had been doing. He prayed in humility to God, and the LORD brought him back to Jerusalem, where Manasseh worked feverishly to undo everything he had done, removing the idols and chucking them out of the city, rebuilding the altar of the LORD, and offer-

¹⁰ This is told in Isaiah 38-39.

ing sacrifices and thank offerings to the LORD. The influence of the king was enough to get the people to leave behind idol worship, and to exclusively worship the LORD, but it wasn't enough to get them to forsake the high places where they used to offer pagan worship.¹¹

Amon

Amon wasn't a fan of his dad's repentance. When Amon took the throne, he reenacted all the pagan worship his father tried to destroy. Thankfully, his reign was short, as the Jews were so disgusted by his actions that they assassinated him after two years.

Josiah

Josiah may be the best king Judah ever had—including David. He destroyed all the idols and places of pagan worship in Judah—including leveling the high places. He ordered repairs be made to the temple. And when in the process they found the Law of Moses (how do you lose that?!), they brought it to him, and he immediately called for national repentance and rededication. His leadership, enthusiasm, and instructions had amazing results: "All his days, they [the Israelites] did not depart from following the LORD, the God of their fathers" (2 Chronicles 34:33).

They celebrated the Passover properly, and Josiah provided all of the Passover lambs for each family present.

There was no Passover like it in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; nor did any of the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah did, with the priests, Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 35:18).

Sadly, Josiah was killed in battle with Pharaoh Necho.

The Other Missing Kings...

Matthew sees no need to include Jehoahaz, son

of Josiah, who reigned 3 months before being deposed by Egypt. Eliakim, another son of Josiah, changed his name to Jehoiakim and reigned 11 years before being taken captive to Babylon.

Jeconiah

Also known as Jehoiachin and Coniah, Jeconiah reigned three months before Babylon took him captive. When this happened, God declared the end of the Kingdom of Judah—so far as an *earthly* king goes. God through Jeremiah said:

Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered jar? Or is he an undesirable vessel? Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they had not known? O land, land, land, Hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD, "Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah" (Jeremiah 22:28-30).

Jeconiah died in Babylonian captivity, but was treated well, and ate at the king's table. Though the throne was no more, the promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David still remained.

From Captivity to Jesus (Matthew 1:12-16)

After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, and Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel fathered Abihud, Abihud fathered Eliakim, and Eliakim fathered Azor. Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, and Achim fathered Eliud. Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, and Matthan fathered Jacob. Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

The last section of the genealogy would only have a few familiar names to the Jewish readers, but the rest could easily be verified at the temple, where genealogical records were kept. Additionally, it is not outside the realm of probability that people would have known who was a part of the "royal" descendants, as heritage was a huge deal for the Jews.

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 33.

Shealtiel

The only times Shealtiel's name is mentioned in the Bible is describing his relationship with someone else. He is the son of Jehoiachin (Jechoniah), and father of Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel

Zerubbabel, as part of the royal line, was installed as governor of Judah after Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to their land. He worked together with Jeshua the high priest to rebuild the temple (from the foundation to the completion)¹² and encourage the people to worship God (Ezra 2:3, 8; 5:2). He is mentioned by Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah—all of whom he worked with.

He served God faithfully, and a prophecy was made by Haggai which shows the promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David went through him.

Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another. On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant," declares the LORD, "and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:21-23).

For more interesting reading on Zerubbabel, check out Zechariah 4.

The Rest of the Names through Jacob

Outside of the fact that they are the royal line, nothing is known about these men. But that they *are*

¹² Zechariah 4:9-10.

the royal line is absolutely important.

Joseph

Joseph was a righteous man. He had to be chosen by God to raise His only begotten Son, Jesus. We will discuss him more in depth in a later lesson. But suffice it to say, he was a kind, thoughtful man who followed God faithfully. Certainly he sinned, but not with rebellion or with knowledgeable intent.

It is important to note that the genealogy says "Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary..." This is *not* a genealogy of Mary. This is *not* a genealogy tracing how

Jesus got His physical DNA, his features, etc. This is a genealogy showing the *legal* claim of Jesus to be the heir of David, the King

of the Jews, the Messiah. Jesus was, legally, the son of Joseph, and was regarded as such, even by Mary (Luke 2:48). Thus He had the legal, legitimate right to claim to be King of the Jews, heir to the throne of David.

What does this mean for us today?

Perhaps most strikingly, it shows God can use flawed, broken, and even wicked people to bring about His desired will. That doesn't mean the wicked people will be honored, but that God can and will keep His promises, even in spite of those wicked people.

It shows God is and has always been ready to accept *anyone* from any nation or background if they commit to following His commands. That means if you've ever asked, "Could God accept someone like me?" your answer from God is *Yes!*

It shows Jesus has the absolute legal claim to the promise given to David, which was based on the promise given to Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.

It shows that genealogies can be interesting!



"BAPTIZING" the Little Kids

Caleb Robertson

I cannot tell you how many people I know that were “dunked in water” as 9 to 13 year olds only to be immersed years later in order to obey *the Gospel* (Rom. 10:16).

Years ago I had a conversation with a brother as we were driving to Bible class about “child immersion.” I made my points, he responded, and that was that. There was a young lady in the backseat of that car-ride who heard the discussion and decided she had never *obeyed the Gospel*, but had simply been “dunked” as a child.

Recently I heard a similar story. Christians received a call of an elderly man seeking baptism. He was on his death bed so there would be obstacles. At first his nephew tried to immerse him in the bathtub, but it wasn’t deep enough. A child’s pool was inflated inside the house and filled by hauling buckets of water from an outdoor spigot. The water came in cold, and seemed to get even colder.

Finally, he was in the cold water. Partly from the shock of cold water and having nothing to cover his nose he came up coughing and heard: “His leg didn’t go under; we’ll have to do it again.” They tried again: “His arm shot out this time; we’ll have to do it again.” On the third try they finally got it.

How did this happen? Years ago the man, now being immersed, was “dunked” as a child. For years folks would tell him he’d never obeyed the Gospel, but had just “gotten wet.” He’d get angry, but they’d respond, “You tell people their immersion [into a denomination] won’t count; I don’t think yours will.”

He held to his child immersion. That is, until he arrived at death’s door... This is what comes from Christians, who know better, dunking children. They age, become doubtful, and wonder if their dunking accomplished anything (Rom. 14:23).

What’s immersion without faith (Col. 2:12)? Doesn’t James 2:20 work both ways: “*works without faith are dead*”? Folks doubt and fear (I John 4:18; 5:13) because they’ve been taught “steps” rather than Gospel.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

(I Corinthians 13:11)

Your child does not understand *the Gospel*, and doesn’t need baptism. What’s happening is you’re doing a good job as a parent: your kids love you, think good things about God, and want to “be good.” But they’re not in danger of Hell, we all know that, and they’re certainly not ready for the responsibility. Just let them be innocent.

Why I Will Not Immerse Your Little Kid

I’ve heard old women say stuff like, “Caleb, my little Samantha is very mature for a nine year old.” This isn’t a maturity contest, but a question of WHO’S GOING TO HELL (Matt. 7:21). Do you think that a nine year old would go to Hell if she died right now? No? Then I’m not immersing her.

“Caleb, my ten year old can recite the steps of salvation.” Is that faith? Does a ten year old’s ability

to say the words, “Believe, Repent, Confess, be Baptized” equal trust in Jesus?

“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...”

(Eph. 1:12)

Timmy doesn’t have faith, Timmy wants in the water.

Would you let your 12 year old marry? Then I don’t see how they’re going to marry the Lord (Eph. 5:23-33; Rev. 21:9). Would you let your 12 year old join the military (2Tim. 2:4)? Will your 12 year old be in the monthly “men’s meeting” (1 Cor. 6:5)? Will the congregation discipline your 10 year old (2 The. 3:6,14-5), or will you, the parent, block the process?

Water baptism is not some family’s right-of-passage, it’s not cute, but is the crucifixion of a sinful man (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 2:20). Now, does your 8 year old need to be crucified? We know the answer. Right now someone’s feelings are hurt, but we don’t mind hurting feelings when we preach truth to those in the denominational sects, do we?

Here are some quotes from Jimmy Allen:

“I do not believe in baptizing five and six-year-old children, a practice followed by some of our religious friends and a few of my own people. Nor do I believe in automatically immersing a child at the age of eight as do the Mormons. No child can be obedient to the baptismal command until he can in faith respond to the Lord’s authority” (Allen, *Re-Baptism?*, p. 4, 1991.).

“I have re-immersed many people... because they felt they were too young when first immersed (about the only way I would baptize a child under nine would be at gunpoint). (Allen, *Fire in My Bones*, p. 218, 2004).

Years ago a preacher, who’s actually a very intelligent Bible student, said one of the dumbest things I’ve ever heard. He asked me, “Caleb, why haven’t you been baptized yet?” and I answered, “I don’t know that I’m ready for that.” The preacher asked further, “Caleb, do you like girls?” I answered,

“Yes.” He then concluded: “Then you need to be baptized!”

According to that preacher I should’ve been baptized when I was five. I’ve always thought girls were cute. Is liking the same as lusting? So when a boy’s hormones start doing things to his body that his brain did not know were coming then his “sins” begin to be counted against him by God?... Give me a break! Here’s an equally ridiculous story:

“Reuel Lemmons stayed with my grandfather during the meeting that summer, as did I. Reuel was on the outlook for people to baptize and he considered me a prime prospect. He told me in the presence of my grandfather that I should consider becoming a Christian. I was not quick to respond. I lowered my head: the proposal was an embarrassment. My grandfather spoke up. ‘Oh, he’s only ten. He’s big for his age.’ Reuel responded that he thought I was older, and I was off the hook” (Olbricht, *Hearing God’s Voice*, p. 78, 1996).

Dunking kids based off their bodily size: traditionalism at its worst! Has a child’s twelfth year become his “eighth day”?

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matt. 18:2-3)

Jesus used little children as the example of innocence. Why are Christians attempting to rush the children to the baptism? Christians use this verse against “Born in Sin,” but quickly abandon it when their child requests to be dunked in water.

Stop MISUSING Scripture to Justify Childhood “Dunking”

If you ever have this discussion with anyone, anywhere, prepare to hear someone bring up Luke 2, that Jesus was in the temple when He was twelve years old. Nobody said that twelve year olds could not be mature, smart, and/or interested in spiritual things, but what I am saying now is that JESUS

WAS NOT BAPTIZED AT AGE 12!

How do you possibly go to Luke 2 and get justification for baptism when literally nobody was being baptized yet? John, Jesus' cousin, would be the first to immerse people and that had not yet happened. Luke 2 has zero to do with water baptism.

"Oh, Jesus was twelve when He was in the temple." Yeah, and Jehoash began reigning as king at 7 years old (2 Kings 11:21). Do you want to baptize a seven year old off of that? Someone asks, "What's 2 Kings 11:21 got to do with water baptism?" Just as much as Luke 2 has to do with water baptism.

Someone says, "He might have reigned, but people were assisting him." No doubt. Jesus may have been in the temple at age 12, but Luke 2:51 says that Jesus, "*went down with them [Mary and Joseph], and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.*" Are your children subject to you or to God? If you answer, "Subject to me, the parent" then there was no sense in dunking them.

Is There a Magic Age for Baptism?

Abraham was ninety-nine when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:24), Ishmael was thirteen when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:25), and Isaac was circumcised at eight days old. A male couldn't serve in Israel's army under twenty years old (Num. 1:3), a Levite could not serve as a priest until age twenty-five (Num. 8:24), but David lowered the age to twenty (1 Chr. 23:27). Jehoash began to reign over Judah at seven years old (2 Kng. 11:21), but was assisted in this task by the high priest, Jehoiada. Jesus was twelve when He was asking questions in the temple (Luke 2:42), but He was not immersed until He was about 30 (Luke 3:23).

What does the above have to do with water baptism? Directly speaking, nothing. However, a case can be made that God does very little with "little children." But, that's a principle, and not a New Testament standard.

I have presented this material before, and received the following question:

"Caleb, if you would not immerse a 10 year

old then at what 'magic age' would you finally immerse them?"

When asked that question I would then ask them if they would immerse a five year old who walked the isle during the post-sermon invitation song? They all said, "No, I would not." I then asked, "Well, if you would refuse a five year old, at what age would you begin saying 'yes'?" They had no specific age for an answer.

I can say that I will NOT immerse a ten year old without becoming obligated to create a speculative, fictitious "age of accountability." I have not argued for a fixed age at which a person may be immersed, but have simply said, "God is too gracious to condemn a child to Hell."

In conclusion I find these thoughts in scripture: only those who can, and do, "*believe*" should be immersed (Mark 16:16), and only those who have presumptuously sinned and are willing to repent (Acts 2:38) should be immersed. What I'm left with is simply Acts 5:14: "*And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.*"

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Matthew 7:23

Does anyone honestly believe that these words would be spoken to any five or ten year old who dies at that age? No? Then why are people immersing them (Acts 2:38; 22:16)?

God is too gracious to condemn a child to Hell!

They Know They are Wrong... They Have to

Why is it "loving" to correct Methodists who sprinkle and Baptists who teach salvation before immersion, but "hateful" to correct Christians? I don't get it, but that's what some are telling me.

I asked one reader about a classmate of mine whose only immersion was at age five. The reader responded with, "I would have concerns... I would show concern and make sure my brother is saved. If he tells me he is and demonstrates understanding of

the plan of salvation, I would drop it.”

Why can the reader have “concerns” when he hears of a 5 year old being immersed, but I can’t have “concerns” when I hear the same of a 10 year old? By “have concerns” he means he doubts the man is now saved from his child-dunking. If he doubts his salvation why is he calling him “brother”? If a grown up can be retroactively convinced that a 5 year old’s immersion was valid, then a 5 year old could presently convince the same adult that they, a 5 year old, needs to be immersed *to avoid Hell*. Nonsense.

Many are treating water baptism as an empty command waiting to be checked off the “to-do-list.”

Reader Goes to Extremes Defending Child Baptism

A woman read an article I’d written on this subject in our local bulletin, and asked, “Caleb, do people guilty of the sins in I Cor. 6:9 need to be immersed to be saved?” I asked her, “Do you know many 5 year olds committing the sins in I Cor. 6:9?”

She gave illustrations of a 9 and 10 year old that she believed justified the “dunking” of any small child. Here are the extreme stories:

“A 10 year old, born to married church-going parents, *‘fornicated’* with a teenager in the woods behind her house. Where were her parents during the *fornication*? Good question. The girl later called it *‘fornication’* resulting from *‘experimental touching.’* The fact is she did so willingly!”

“A 9 year old, born to married church-going parents, *‘stole’* \$100 from a savings jar to buy something her parents had told her she couldn’t have. She was disciplined for the theft.”

What do these extreme cases have to do with the common child? Nothing. This woman clearly appeals to extremes, but then applies the extreme circumstances back on to the common circumstances.

Did the 10 year old *know* her action? Had *fornication* been explained as don’t put ‘that’ in ‘there’? I doubt it. Also, a 10 year old with a “teenager” sounds like a case of molestation rather than *forni-*

cation.

“Bad things” can be done and the doer retain his innocence. An adult male could coerce a mentally handicapped adult female into *“fornicating.”* However, everyone would declare the female as innocent.

Again, a mentally handicapped adult who still lives with her parents might *“steal”* money from her mother’s purse, but we’d declare her innocent. Why can a small child not receive the same grace given to a mentally handicapped adult?

I know a preacher’s son who, at 5 or 6 years old, took cash out of the Sunday collection plate. He later told his parents, “I *stole* from God,” and the money was returned. Was he going to Hell at age 5? Did he need immersion at age 5? Deliver us from the *“austere men”* (Lk. 19:21-22) that answer “Yes.”

“the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.”

Deut. 1:31

When God wants to illustrate His grace He speaks of a man and His **child...** how is this a gracious illustration if God sends little children to Hell? God **doesn’t** condemn little children!

These People are Fighting Tooth and Nail to Put the Little Kids in Hell...

“Judgment” isn’t just automatic condemnation to Hell, but can be the declaration of *innocence* upon consideration of all factors and circumstances (Pas. 51:4; 103:8, Rom. 2:4; 7:9, and Jas. 4:6).

These same people would argue against Calvinists that children are not born in sin, but are born innocent. Well, they don’t believe they stay innocent too long. The Calvinist says little kids are going to Hell for Adam’s sin, but these graceless “Christians” say little kids go to Hell for their own “sin.”

If you cannot comprehend how a child could do a “bad thing” and God overlook it then you are admitting that you don’t understand how Christians stay saved. Christians don’t go to Heaven because they

never sin, Christians go to Heaven because God dismisses the sins they do commit:

“Blessed are they whose iniquities are for-given, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin... There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...”

Rom. 4:7-8; 8:1

I’m trying to defend God’s grace! God will NOT condemn a child to Hell! Those who have taken issue with my position are those who were “dunked” as children. They don’t hear “grace,” but hear their need to be immersed now as a responsible adult. Both are true: God is gracious to children, and some adults are trusting in an ineffectual childhood-dunking.

One man, a student of several “brotherhood schools,” defended immersing children by saying,

“If a 5 year old can tell me ‘what sin is’ and ‘what happens if they die’ then who am I to refuse them?”

Is that the Gospel? Neither of his questions have anything to do with Jesus of Nazareth. There’s always been a knowledge of sin (Gen. 3-4), and a belief of the afterlife (Gen. 15:15), but those two items are not the Gospel. He says you just have to know I John 3:4 and Luke 16’s good place/bad place. Can a five year old “*trust*” Christ (Eph. 1:12-13)?

Three readers wrote to me,

“Baptized age 10yrs, 11mo. Saved since. Not about the age. It’s about the person. But mostly about the Lord.”

“At ten years old, the son of a preacher, I knew what sin was and that I had committed sin.”

“All sinners need Jesus – no age requirements. Anyone who dies in a lost state will go to Hell – no age requirement”

If the first reader had written a month before his baptism, would he have said, “Age 10yrs, 10mo. Hell bound”? Who can believe that? Yet this man believes if he had died an unimmersed 10 year old, he would’ve gone to Hell.

I love these people, but good night—this view of God is horrendous. The American Government would not even sentence a five or ten year old to life in prison, but they believe God will condemn a five or ten year old for eternity!? The Bible says that Jesus **CELEBRATES** little children (Matt. 19:14), not CONDEMNS them.

This view is not based on *faith, hope, and love* (I Cor. 13:13), but fear and obligation. And we wonder why kids grow up to leave the church, or why few disciples are made.

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

Romans 7:9

Paul, as the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), would have always had Biblical instruction. However, he says there was a time when he was without, or outside, of the law. He was receiving education (law), but he was not being held responsible for any infractions he might commit. Do we not believe God still views children in the Romans 7:9 way?

What’s The Criteria For Salvation?

The reader from earlier further defended his childhood dunking by saying that he was, “Very mature for his age. A thinker by birth.” Is it all about knowledge? Marshall Keeble famously said, “You don’t have to be a genius to obey the Gospel, just honest.” That seems to be in line with Mark 12:37’s, “*the common people heard him gladly.*”

When we start making it about “knowledge” the question becomes, “How much must we know before baptism?” It cannot simply be about knowledge. If it were then a child would be punished for being reared by Christians. The child receives education by virtue of being raised with Christian parents, but therefore enters condemnation earlier than others? Surely not. A child memorizes “Believe, repent, confess, be baptized” with Acts 2:38 and now he’s eternally guilty? That’s what these folks are saying.

What does a person have to know before baptism? **The Gospel, they have to know the Gospel,**

and reciting “five steps” is not the Gospel. What does Romans 5:7-10 mean to a ten year old? Nothing. What does John 15:13-15 mean to a ten year old? Nothing. The ten year old might know a handful of baptism passages, but are they “*dying with Christ*”? Have they bore the Devil’s yoke to seek an exchange for Christ’s (Matt. 11:28-30)? Fearing Hell doesn’t mean you’re going there—for proof see 1 John 3:20-21.

Child Immersion & Our Refusal to Evangelize

In his 1966 book, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, Sam Hill, American Historian, stated that the church of Christ was the 3rd largest religious group in the south. However, Hill noted that churches of Christ do not include little children in their membership while Baptists commonly “receive children as young as eight, nine, or ten years of age...” (Hill, *Crisis*, pgs. 35-36). How times have changed.

The 60s were a very evangelistic time for the Lord’s church according to Baptist Seminary President, Wayne Dehoney’s 1971 book, *Set the Church Afire!*: “This fast growing group is one of the most potent missionary and evangelistic forces in the country” (Dehoney, *Afire*, p. 30).

It appears when the church was evangelistic they didn’t fool with “dunking children,” but now, when the church is very un-evangelistic, we see loads of little kids being “dunked.” Why is that? Lack of baptisms come from, in many cases, lack of evangelism. Consequently congregations are desperate to see an immersion and will do whatever’s necessary to see one, even dunk a child that doesn’t need it.

Notice Tom Olbricht’s experience in Pennsylvania:

“This church, though atypical in educational level, was similar to a number of congregations in the 1960s in that region... The main agenda, since we had so many children (we were in the midst of the Baby Boom), was to bring up our offspring in the faith. **We put our energy into** church classes, youth meetings with other congregations, and summer youth camps... We kept

adding numbers, **but mainly** because of people moving in, either to teach at or attend the university. We were baptizing a few in the community and at the university, **but mostly our own children.** We tried several methods of reaching outsiders, but none proved imminently successful” (Olbricht, *Hearing God’s Voice*, p. 303, 1996).

I like Olbricht’s writings, and I want to give him credit wherever I can, but I know when members of the church of Christ say that they “tried evangelism” they often did not try too hard, nor for too long. Even with all the inward focus, Flavel Yeakly had to write his book, *Why They Left*.

Being Fair – It’s not Just the Un- Evangelistic that Dunk Little Children

The non-evangelistic are desperate to see an immersion, but the evangelistic can be desperate in their own way: desperate to prove that their method gets results. So they, too, might dunk innocent children.

It wasn’t just Reuel Lemmons who was overly eager to dunk a child for the sake of “stats,” but a handful of the preacher biographies and evangelistic “how-to-books” will tell stories and picture preachers immersing little kids. Gimmicks can create excitement. Here’s an account of gimmickry from the biography of James Harding, *The Eyes of Jehovah*:

“...had himself been in a meeting once where people were not responding. He found a new member who had recently moved into the community and persuaded him to come forward and be baptized again to ‘break the ice’ and start people coming. Harding declared he had never been as wicked as that, but he used to be anxious for the first responses to begin and the people start shaking hands with them and with one another, for this started a wave of emotion” (Sears, *Eyes of Jehovah*, p. 59, 1970).

Is it possible that disciples of Christ have become overly concerned with immersion? In Acts 2 Peter said, “*be baptized*,” but in Acts 3:19 he said “*be converted*.” While they can be synonymous it is possible to have *immersion* without *conversion*.

“Teenager” Speaks on “Child Immersion”

I don’t mean to belabor the point. I didn’t go hunting for this quote but found it as I prepared for an evening edition of *What Does the Bible Say?* However, the quote is good and pertinent to our recent discussions:

“At fourteen I was the last holdout among the teenagers in our little congregation. It wasn’t that I questioned the need to be baptized, but I wanted to do it only when I was sure I was ready. There were constant reminders that I was not yet fully accepted into the fellowship of believers. When the bread and the ‘fruit of the vine’ were passed among the worshipers during our weekly observance of Communion, I passed them along to the next person without partaking, as if shouting out an admission that I was not yet a Christian. And when young men were being chosen to pass the Communion, of course, I was never asked. There was also subtle pressure from certain members of the congregation who wondered why the preachers’ son was the last of the young people in his age group to ‘respond to the invitation.’ Fortunately, neither my mother nor my father said a word, or even hinted that I was past the time of making the big decision. But my older sisters had not let it escape their attention. A well-meaning comment here and there, or a story told within my hearing about how someone my age had been killed in an accident before he was baptized, showed their fear of what could happen to me if I continued to drag my feet. And whenever the subject arose at church among my friends—all of whom had been baptized at various ages from nine to thirteen—they exhibited what I felt to be a self-righteous air about their now-confirmed status as Christians.

I retuned the smugness in my own mind, believing that they had been baptized solely out of fear of going to hell, or because they wanted to please their parents, or because some visiting preacher had successfully played on their immature emotions. Some of them had been baptized in pairs or groups, like teaming up to undergo a fraternity initiation. Whatever else was going through my mind in those awkward

teenage years, I resolved that I not be baptized just because it was expected of me.” (Smith, *Baptism: The Believer’s Wedding Ceremony*, pgs. 7-8, 2013)

An atmosphere of social pressure to meet expectations of men is NOT faith. Is this what’s best for children? Good or bad, it’s what’s being peddled: reluctant legalism by persistent coercion. I don’t think we can say, “*let him take the water of life freely*” when one’s pushed against their will.

What If It’s Not Against Their Will?

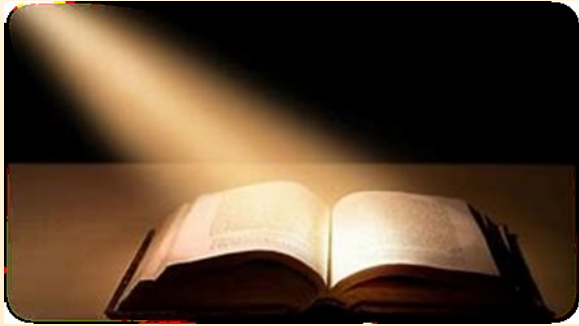
Someone says, “Caleb, we did not pressure our ten year old into immersion. He cheerfully requested it” I ask, what other life-altering requests would you be willing to grant to your ten year old?

Upon being immersed your ten year old comes to you and says, “Parents, I’ve been thinking about it and I don’t believe instrumental music in worship is wrong. Therefore, I’ll be moving my membership to a congregation more fitting to my beliefs.”

If your ten year old can decide for himself that he’s going to *put on the Lord in baptism* (Gal. 3:27) then surely he’s capable of deciding how and where to worship. He’s given his whole life to the Lord, but suddenly he’s not **allowed** to disagree with his parents on doctrine? Suddenly he isn’t as mature, intelligent, and free as he was five minutes ago?

A parent asks, “How could I tell my ten year old ‘No’ when they asked to be immersed?” The same way you tell them “No” any other time they desire to make a life altering decision on their own. Can your ten year old decide that they want to change their gender? No? Then how is it that they decided to make the biggest decision of their life: obeying the Gospel, becoming a disciple of Christ?

Some are being serious with the Bible, and some are “playing church.”



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1 CORINTHIANS 4

A new translation and commentary

Matthew Shaffer

“So let a man consider us to be servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. What is more, it is required that stewards be found trustworthy. But it is a very small thing to me if I should be judged by you or by human judgments; rather, I will not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, but I am not justified in this. The one who judges me is the Lord. For this reason, do not judge anything before the right time has arrived – until our Lord shall come, who will illuminate what is shrouded by darkness and will reveal the purposes of our hearts; and then each one will receive praise from God.

Now brothers, I have applied these things to myself and to Apollos for your benefit, so that you might learn through us not to go beyond what has been written – so that none of you may become conceited in favor of one against the other. Who then is separating you? What do you have that was not

given to you by another? If it was given to you, why do you boast as if you had obtained it yourself?

You are already full, you are rich, you have ruled as kings without us; and I wish that you really had ruled, so that we also could reign with you. For it seems to me that God has made us, the apostles, to be a final demonstration – as if we are condemned to death – because we have been made into a spectacle for the world, for both angels and men. We are foolish for Christ, yet you are wise in Christ; we are weak, yet you are strong; you are honorable, and yet we are without honor. Even now, we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed, and we are beaten; we are homeless, and we work with our own hands. We bless when we are cursed, we endure when we are persecuted, we offer comfort when we are slandered; we have been made to be like the refuse of the world, the offscouring of everything, even now!

I do not write these things because I want to

shame you, but rather as instructions for beloved children. For even if you have ten thousand tutors in Christ, you do not have many fathers; for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to become imitators of me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is a beloved child to me and faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

Some of you are conceited, as if you believe that I will not come to you again, but I will come to you quickly if the Lord is willing. Then, I will not experience what these conceited brethren have said, but rather their power, for the kingdom of God does not consist of words but of power. What do you want? Do you want me to come to you with a rod of correction, or in love with a spirit of gentleness?"

Notes on the Translation

6: "Not to go beyond what has been written..." – The NIV, NRSV, and Martin Luther's translation take this to be a quoted saying, for example: "So that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, 'Nothing beyond what is written.'" (NRSV). I do not see that there is any difference in meaning if this was a well-known saying, or simply Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians in this place.

7: "What do you have that was not given to you by another? If it was given to you, why do you boast as if you had obtained it yourself?" – These questions are rendered more literally in most translations: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (NASB 1995). I have changed the wording a little to preserve the emphasis in English. If we have received something, it was given to us by someone else. If we have not received it, then we have obtained it by ourselves. These questions emphasize the fact that the Corinthians had not accomplished anything by their own power, but they had to rely on God.

That You Might Learn Through Us...

Notes on 1 Corinthians 4

Introduction

In the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul has described the path to Christian unity. God chose to save us through the foolishness of the cross – a plan that could never have been produced by human logic – so that every Christian must humble himself and recognize the shortcomings of his own wisdom and strength. This common humility in Christ forces each of us to give up the things that could elevate us over another. There is no division between one group or another, for we all must learn from Christ. Apart from Him, we know nothing. Apart from Him, we could accomplish nothing. Christ is the power of God that lifts us out of our weakness, and the Spirit is the wisdom of God which trains us to think like God and to view the world through His eyes. We find our unity in Christ, not in our own abilities. Those who grow to great wisdom and strength through Him remain His servants, and nothing more. They have not achieved their status by themselves, but only because God saw fit to train them and to equip them.

Paul concludes this line of thought in chapter 4 by applying his teachings directly to the Corinthians, particularly in their relationship with him. The congregation at Corinth had failed to safeguard their unity – they had failed even to comprehend what they had received in Christ. They wanted to be better than each other, and so they lost sight of the true purpose of the gospel and of their congregation.

1-5

Paul resumes his thoughts from chapter 3 directly – "For this reason, let a man consider us..." Paul seems to be referring to himself and to Apollos here, so that the Corinthians will look at the two of them as they really were. They were not great, wise, or strong men, they were simply servants of Christ who had been entrusted with knowledge. The power they wielded was not their own – they were acting on Christ's behalf. They had not unraveled the mysteries of the universe on their own – the Spirit had

told them what was hidden. Therefore, they had responsibility, and they did deserve respect as God's faithful servants, but their status was not their own.

This standing in relation to Christ meant that Paul and Apollos could not use their power and wisdom according to their own desires. If we are servants and stewards, we must be faithful to our master – otherwise our responsibilities will be taken away from us. Paul had become wise according to the Scriptures, but he could only use that wisdom in line with Christ's instructions to him.

This meant that Paul's conduct could not be judged by anyone other than the Lord Himself. He understood his instructions, but he was not in a position to decide whether he had fulfilled them or not. The Corinthians did not have the authority or perspective to judge him, nor did anyone else except for the Lord. Paul, like everyone else, will have to wait until the day of judgment to hear the Lord's assessment of his work. The Lord will not only assess the things that Paul said and did, but also the "purposes of our hearts," the reasons why we make the decisions that we do. Paul drew a distinction in the last chapter between someone who honestly and sincerely makes a mistake, but is willing and able to grow from it, and someone who deliberately causes harm to the church of God. These passages show that God will not only ask *what* we have done, but also *why* we have done it. Both factors will affect whether we receive praise from God in the end.

6-7

Here, Paul explains why he has spent so much time talking about himself and Apollos, and their relationship to God and to the church in Corinth – he wanted them to understand the principles of how we work with God in Christ so that they could apply it to themselves. It is always easier to discern the truth of a matter when we are not emotionally involved in the outcome. Paul tells the Corinthians that this whole conversation has really been about certain Christians who had become "conceited in favor of one against the other," but he did not discuss their names or their conceit directly, since he knew that they would react emotionally to such a

direct rebuke. Instead, he used himself and Apollos as examples so that they could agree with him easily and now, at the end of the discussion, he is asking them to put themselves into his shoes. "You can see that my role as a servant and a steward of God gives me both humility and responsibility. Doesn't the same lesson apply to you and your role toward God and your fellow Christians?"

Paul tells the Corinthians that he wants them to learn "not to go beyond what has been written." This is what it means to learn from the Spirit of God. God has revealed His unknowable thoughts through His Spirit, and these thoughts have been recorded for us in the written Scriptures. If we commit ourselves to knowing only what the Spirit has made available to us, then we cannot make rules or judgments that are not found in Scripture. This is not to say that a mature Christian cannot learn to exercise his rational judgment to apply the teachings of Scripture to a decision not explicitly mentioned in its pages, since this application of wisdom is fully based on what is written, but it means that we should learn to use the Word of God according to its own purpose. God trusts us, and He has given us the instructions that we need to accomplish His work. It would not be proper for us to change or add to His instructions, nor to use the tools we find in Scripture for a purpose other than His.

When we adopt this outlook on our work as Christians, Paul's questions in verse 7 make a lot of sense. If we are all serving God's purpose with the tools and knowledge that God has entrusted to our care, what difference can there really be between us? We serve the same God, and we have only what He has given to us. If one of us is given a more prominent role, it is only because he has been entrusted with that role, not because he has achieved it himself. He cannot boast because God remains the source of his glory.

8-13

Despite this fact, the Corinthian Christians had boasted. They had made themselves into something great. They had acted as though they were kings. They were not willing to submit themselves to the

humility that their role as servants and stewards demanded of them. Paul's wish, that "we (the apostles) also could reign with you," seems to express a degree of sympathy toward the Corinthians on Paul's part. From a human perspective, it would be nice if our service to God held the promise of a certain degree of comfort – of elevation above the hate and suffering of the world. However, when Paul compared the Corinthians' idea of spiritual maturity to the life that the apostles led, it was clear that they were pursuing two separate ideals.

Paul speaks of the apostles as a final demonstration – a spectacle for the world. Perhaps this demonstration was designed to communicate the same message as Jesus' death on the cross, which Paul has described already in this book. Perhaps the fact that God worked through such simple, weak, and often pitiable people to accomplish His great miracles was meant to show once more that His victory will not depend on human abilities. In any case, it was clear when one examined the apostles and the Corinthians that the two groups led very different lives. The one was characterized by humility, foolishness, and weakness, while the other paraded its honor, wisdom, and strength.

14-17

Paul did not write about the apostles' humility to prove that they were *better* than the Corinthians – he did not want to do any harm to the congregation there. Rather, he pointed out the disparity between their attitudes to bring their attention to an area where they needed to grow. Paul shared a special bond with the Corinthian church; he was their father in Christ. They had believed through his teaching and through the miracles God had worked through him. As a father, Paul did not want to ridicule them or discourage their growth, but he wanted to see them reach the same level of maturity that he had. This meant that he needed to rebuke them from time to time and give them instruction at other times. In this case, since he could not be there personally, he sent Timothy as his representative. Timothy was a faithful servant, and he would be able to guide the Corinthians in the right direction, the same as Paul

had done in every congregation where he had labored.

18-21

Paul perceived that some of the conceit that troubled the congregation in Corinth was based on the thought that they had "outgrown" him and his teachings. Rather than becoming imitators of the humility and commitment that Paul embodied, some teachers believed that they could set a new trend, one that they liked better. They believed that they would not have to face Paul, nor come to terms with the disparity between their actions and the gospel of Christ. They thought that their new direction was here to stay.

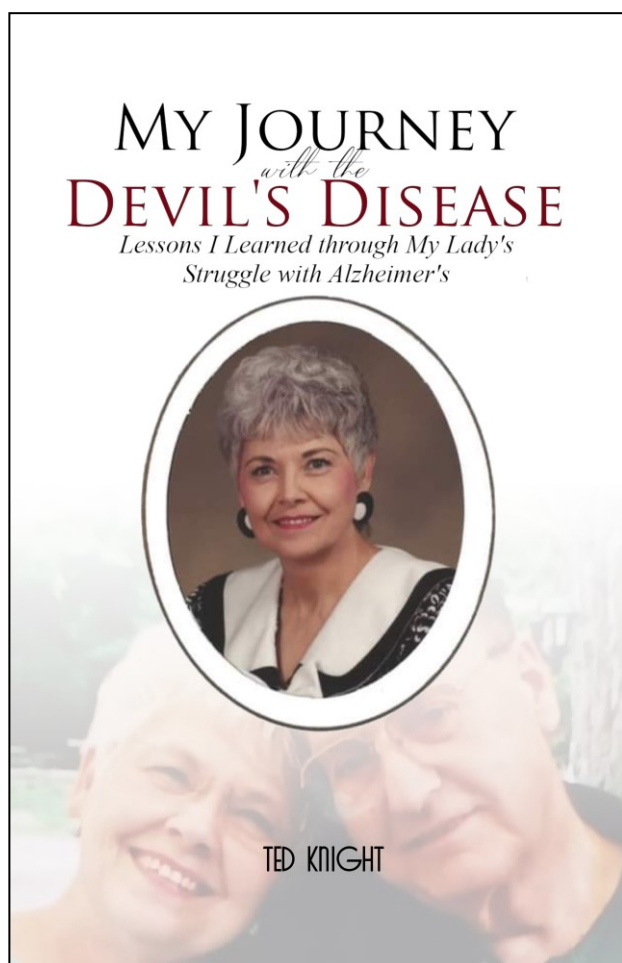
But Paul promised to them that he would come to correct the congregation's trajectory, and it was up to them to determine the tone of his visit. They could fight against Paul and against the gospel – but what power did they have that could resist the power of God? This kind of defiance would only result in a harsher correction. Instead, Paul encouraged them to reconsider their words and their actions. It would be better for them if he could work in love with a spirit of gentleness, so that he could calmly and patiently guide them in the right direction.

Conclusion

These verses set the tone for the rest of the letter. Paul has explained the strife in Corinth in conceptual terms – namely, the Christians there had grown conceited and eschewed the humility that a life in God's service demands. He has shown a better pattern of behavior in himself and in Apollos, and he has encouraged them to change their outlook to imitate the same pattern. Paul's promise that he would come to Corinth and correct the congregation's course, whatever it took, should have given them the push that they needed to read the rest of the letter with an open mind, ready to receive guidance on how to solve the questions and arguments that had torn the congregation apart.

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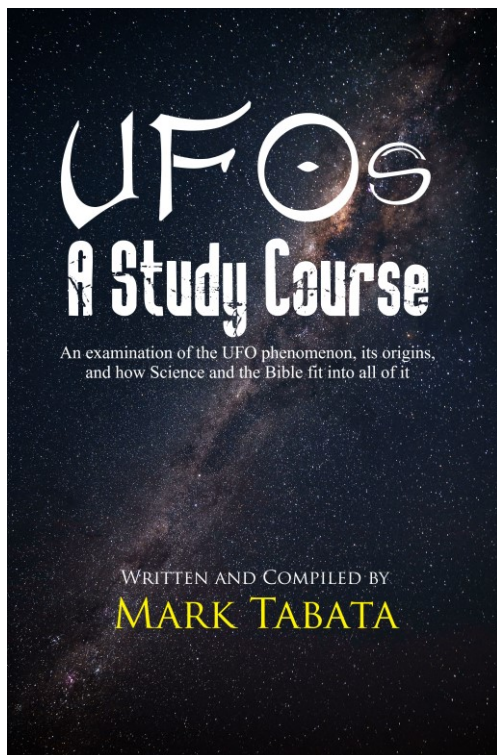
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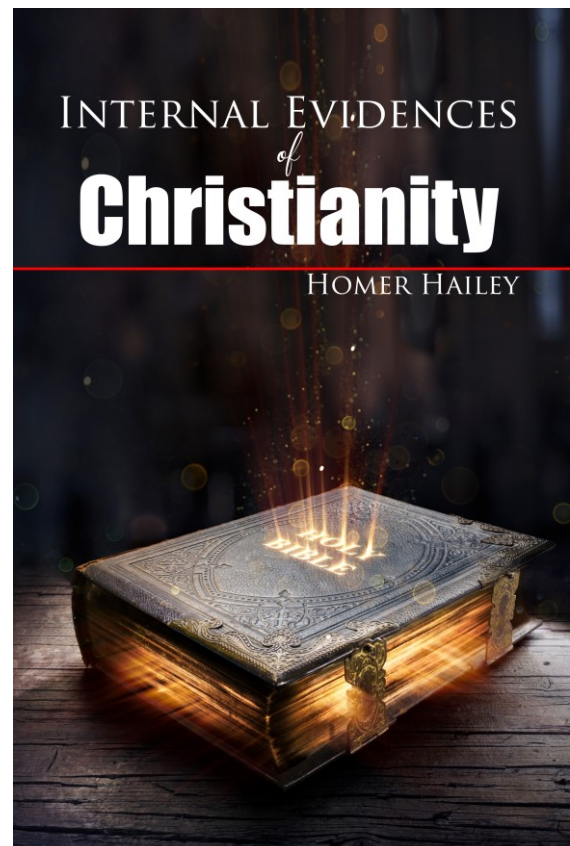
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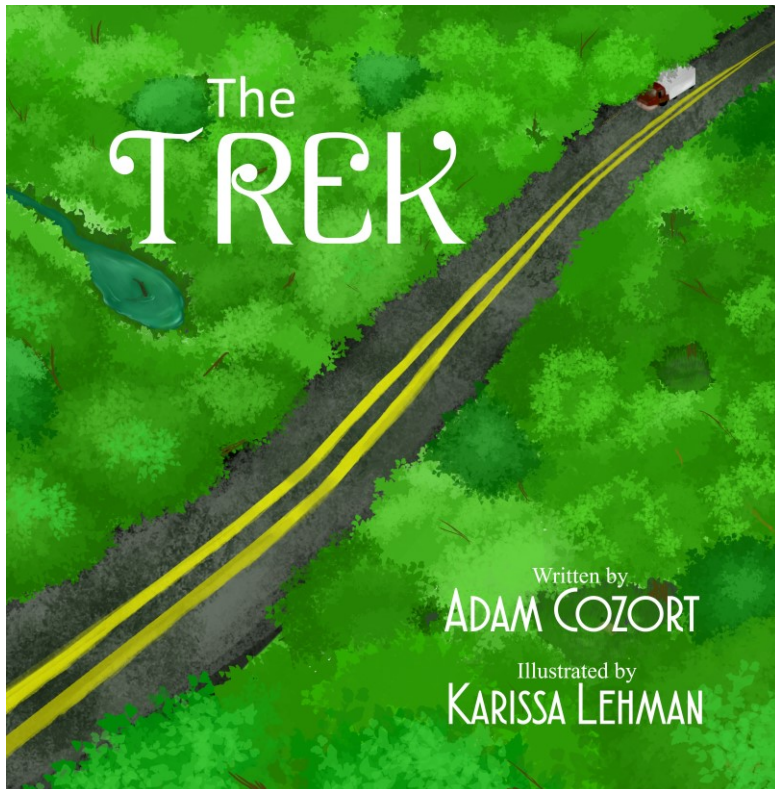
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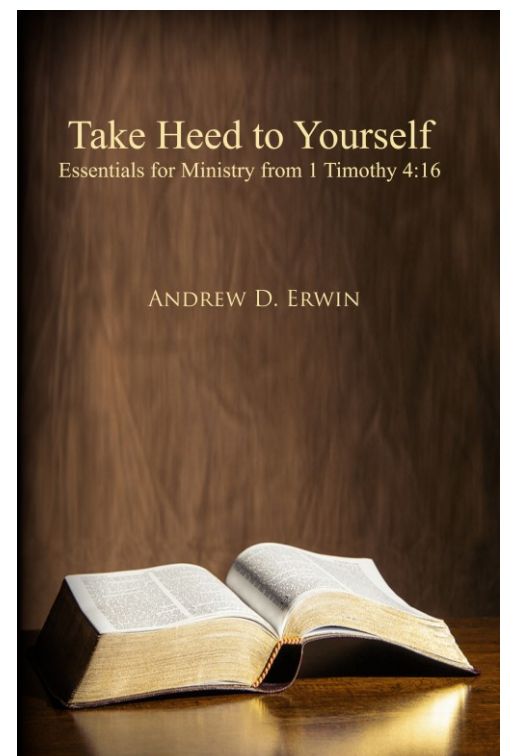
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Go and **SIN NO MORE**

Bill Howard

These are the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ, spoken to the woman who was taken in adultery. The Scribes and Pharisees brought her to Jesus. They stated: *Master this woman was caught in the very act, and the law commands that she should be stoned, so what do you say, Jesus?* They were trying to put Jesus in a bad situation in order to condemn Him. The Jews were forbidden to use capital punishment by the Roman government without cause and permission, and the Romans did not consider adultery a reason for capital punishment. Those accusers likely had a smirk on their face believing they had put Jesus in a corner. However, our Lord was not going to allow that to happen.

The account tells us that Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. After the second time He did this, He stated: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). When He stood and realized that all those were leaving, He questioned her: “Where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?” (John 8:10). When she answered in the negative, He said, “neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more” (John 8:11). This is indicative of Jesus’ mercy and goodness. He did not intend to carry out their wishes and yet did not want them to be able to accuse Him of failing to heed the law of Moses. In essence, He put the decision on them, if any one of you who accuse this lady is without sin, then let him cast the stone.

We read in the account that one by one they departed, and Jesus was left alone with the woman.

Jesus was not sanctioning sin and certainly not condoning the action of the woman. What He intended was to use this incident as an opportunity to teach a very important lesson. We who sin (and we all do) should be concerned about our own situation and not desire to sit in judgment of others. On another occasion, Jesus said this:

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam in in thine own eye?”

(Matthew 7:1-4)

Don’t be a hypocrite, you are a sinner, the writer is a sinner; let each of us look to our own needs first. The Apostle Paul said to the Romans: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). When the Holy-Spirit-inspired teacher says *all*, how many does that not include? John wrote: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:10). Leaves no doubt then, we all do sin. Is sin a bad thing? Should we have any concern about sin?

Yes indeed, sin is a terribly powerful force that is

supported and advanced by our adversary, Satan. The power of sin is second only to the magnificent power of our Living God. Recognizing the power of sin, we must be constantly on guard in order to prohibit Satan from gaining control of our mind and body. There is nothing more satisfying to the Devil than to take one of God's chosen from the fold and set them on the course of lust for the worldly enticements. Is it likely that we as children of God do not give enough thought to the dangers of sin? It's possible. This being true, perhaps we would do well to spend some time contemplating the detriment of sin.

Sin covers such a broad range of activities; we will attempt to define its meaning. As a beginning point, we know that it is the contradiction of everything God is and is opposed to God unceasingly. Sin can be defined as failure, transgression, error, evil, trespassing, lawlessness, unrighteousness, and missing the mark or target. There are others we could consider, but these will suffice for defining sin. We know that sin had its beginning on earth with Eve and Adam who sinned by failing to do as God had directed them, and it has besieged mankind ever since. The Apostle Paul warned the Romans:

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof."

(Romans 6:12).

Paul to the Corinthians:

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

(1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

The Christian must guard against such. Paul wrote to the Romans: "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7); and we dare not let such into our lives and rule.

To the Galatians, the Apostle wrote:

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, reveling and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

(Galatians 5:19-21)

Quite a list of sins which we must not allow into our lives. If we fail to inherit the kingdom of God, we have lost all. Jesus said that "all these things come from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:23). Hear the wisdom of James the brother of Jesus:

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

(James 1:14-15)

Sin does not have its beginning with the overt act of doing wrong; sin has its beginning in the heart, the mind of man, and then leads us into acting on our desires. John wrote: "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1 John 3:8), and this is true. Since the fall of the angels, the sin of Adam and Eve, the blatant disobedience of the Israelites, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism, to the present day, the devil/Satan works tirelessly to ensnare Christians with temptation, imprison them with sin, and harden their hearts so they will not attempt to return to the fold. We have been admonished:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

(2 Peter 5:8)

When Eve fell to the temptation presented by the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit, then gave of the fruit to Adam, and he also ate of it; sin was introduced upon earth for the first time. It is at this point that we learn of the power of sin and Satan. Paul wrote to the Romans:

“Wherefore by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

(Romans 5:12)

So, God was correct in warning Adam and Eve that if they ate that fruit they would die. Not only did they eventually die, but all of mankind since has or will experience death. So, we can comprehend the power of sin; it not only brings death, but it separates the sinner from God. In the beginning, Adam and Eve had the gratification of being with God, a personal relationship. Sin took that away from them along with their pleasant home. So, if we haven't given much thought to sin and its consequences, perhaps this is a good time to ponder it extensively. Sin is that one thing that can and will separate us from our Holy Father and deny us the privilege of eternal life in the heavenly realm that Jesus said He would prepare for us.

Let's look again at the words of James: “and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15b). Those words are talking of the final death, the death which seals God's judgment that sends sinners to their final abode, eternal condemnation, the culminating effect of the work of sin and Satan. Never underestimate the power of sin as it vies with righteousness for our attention. Satan's never-ceasing efforts to win us with temptation and enticements calls for a powerful dedication to live righteously and with determined resistance to Satan and his co-workers. James tells us: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). The greatest resistance we can muster is to give ourselves to God. Temptation is a powerful force and will plant evil thoughts and wishes, and evil thoughts lead to evil actions, and we are overcome with sin—and unrepented sinfulness will bring the death penalty from God.

The writer of the Hebrew letter said: “Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31). The Hebrew author also said: “For if we sin willfully after that we

have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (10:26). This is the truth: Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross in order that He could offer salvation to those who believe and obey His wishes. He cannot sacrifice Himself again, and we understand that there is no other sacrifice to be made. Paul said that we all sin and come short of the Glory of God. All have sinned, and there is no more sacrifice for sin: are we all lost then? Not necessarily, it is still up to us to decide what we will do.

When the woman was brought to Jesus who was an adultress, the Law dictated that she was to be stoned for her sin. Jesus had mercy and because of all the circumstances involved, He made a way for her to be forgiven; Jesus did not condemn her. He does not wish to condemn us either. God made a way of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ for all who choose to accept it. It is His wish that all would be saved, that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). So, for those who wish forgiveness of sin after they have escaped sin the first time through obedience to the will of Christ; His mercy is abundant and there is a way of escape. The cleansing blood of our Savior is an ongoing blessing offered to the child of God who gets caught up in sin, but it is conditional. Hear again the words of John: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8), also, “If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:10). However, He makes known that we can be forgiven: “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). When we confess our sins and seek forgiveness, it indicates that we are penitent and desire to be cleansed from those sins. We must want forgiveness, and we must confess our sins; He is faithful and just and will forgive us. Then we do our very best to escape sin, but we will fall and will depend on the blood of our Savior to cleanse us when we confess and continually pray for the cleansing blood to rid us of sin.



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HOW TO CHANGE YOURSELF AND YOUR RELATION TO GOD A PATTERN FOR SELF-HELP AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Gerald Cowan

Habits are hard to break. This applies to both new and old, whether good or bad. Habits get a firm hold and do not let go easily. Sometimes a once-conquered habit can reassert itself. Humans are “creatures of habit.” We tend to continue acting as we have acted in the past. The longer a habit continues, the more deeply it becomes ingrained, and the harder it is to change. This is true of all habits, good or bad.

Ephesians 4:22-24 shows that major changes must occur when we are converted to serve the Lord and benefit from His gospel. Our customary way of life (what has become “second nature” to us), our practices and attitudes, our imperfect standards and goals must be replaced by new ones. Christians must learn and make and practice a new life (Rom. 6:4, Eph. 4:22-24). Put off the old, put on the new. Become a new person re-created in and by Christ. That requires elimination and removal of bad habits and not allowing them to return.

Knowing what changes to make is not enough. We also need to know how to make them. Change does not come easily. But, since the Scriptures provide us for all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17), they give all the guidance we need. God’s word is the best source of guidance for self-help and motivation for self-improvement.

From the multitude of possibilities we will present a few, actually twelve practical, biblical steps for changing, making, and improving ourselves and becoming what God wants us to be. Yes, you can call this another **Twelve-Step Self-Help Program**.

THE FIRST FOUR STEPS ARE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. SUCCESS IS NOT POSSIBLE UNTIL THESE ARE CONFIRMED.

Step 1. Select the Standard by which you will judge yourself.

Possibilities are limited, but you must choose.

The world. There are several subsets in this category: Government and national laws; contemporary society, culture, ethnicity and tradition.

Religion. Again there are many subsets in this category. It may be the God or gods and the faith and religion of my fathers, the history and traditions of one’s race and ethnicity, nation, family, etc. It may be the God of the Bible and law and requirements imposed by Him. Even here one may choose from a multitude of professed Christian possibilities: Catholic or non-Catholic, Protestant denominations, and myriad non-Judeo Christian religions. The only proper choice is the Bible, the standard and will of God as revealed in it. Even here you must make a choice between Old and New Testa-

ments, to become and be either Jew or Christian. The proper choice is the New Testament, Christ and his gospel the fulfillment of God's Plan for humanity.

Step 2. Find out exactly who and what and where you are.

Measure and evaluate yourself and your life by God's word in the New Testament.

You are human, not animal, not sub-human or super-human. You must accept the capacities and capabilities, the potential and possibilities, also the rules, regulations, requirements, restrictions, and responsibilities of humanity.

You cannot isolate or separate yourself from your nature, your personal being. You must accept your assigned-at-birth gender and the roles and relationships appropriate to it. This applies not only to yourself but to any and all others, all groups of which you are a part: marriage and family, business and vocation, church, nation, etc.

Step 3. Choose and set your purposes and goals. Josh. 24:15, Phil. 1:22-24

Until you decide upon your ultimate goal your life will, for all practical purposes, be *untoward* (Acts 2:40 KJV), aimless, directionless, drifting, not purposefully going anywhere (Acts 2:40). Like water, your path will take the way of least resistance and end up puddling at the lowest possible level. The flow is always downhill, not up. Even if your goal is as simple and superficial as "to enjoy life and have a good time," you must first define the terms "enjoy" and "good time." You may find the definition keeps changing – what you enjoy and consider good are only temporary concepts. The desire to achieve your ultimate goal and purpose will be a chief motivation for all your activities and endeavors.

Of course intermediate goals are important, but it is the ultimate goal that is most important. It is one's chief motivation. It actually prompts and promotes the intermediate goals. Intermediate goals are steps along the way to achieving the ultimate goal. For example: forgiveness of sin is an intermediate goal.

It is not a permanent possession or an unchangeable position.

If one's ultimate goal is to be in God's eternal heaven it will motivate one to do all that is right and required, while avoiding all that is wrong and forbidden. Initial salvation is essential. Ongoing forgiveness and maintenance of fellowship are essential (Heb. 5:29). Living what God calls a good life may have self-denial and removal of hindering pleasures and pursuits attached.

The development of a Christian lifestyle with Christian qualities. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, faith, meekness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) are not self-contained goals but rather parts of the process of achieving the ultimate goal of eternal fellowship with God.

The imitation of apostles, even imitation of Christ or of God is part of the process and not the actual identifiable goal of the Christian. The desire to be like the Lord is a powerful motivation, but it is a pragmatic secondary or subsidiary to eternal life in the Lord's heaven.

Many worthwhile goals can be achieved and yet fail to achieve the ultimate and absolutely essential one. Making a worldly fortune is not equivalent to or even necessary for heaven. Being a respected member in some church is not enough, or necessarily valid.

Step 4. Declare your goals and purposes. Commit yourself to them.

The importance of declaring your goals and purposes is self-evident. Declare them to yourself. The declaration and commitment will guide your way of life, your activities, attitudes, and relationships.

Declare them to others. They can monitor your progress. They can also assist you and encourage you to stay on your chosen path.

Declare them to God. He is concerned about your thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:13). He wants you to succeed if you are taking His path (Mt. 7:13-14). *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him also. And He will bring it to pass* (Psalm 37:5). He will

guide and provide. He will retain and restrain. He will lift and assist

What comes next? The goal is not achieved simply by desiring it and stating it.

We can sum up the first four steps in the process in this way: Find out who, what, and where you are. Decide who, what, and where you want to be. Be sure it is what God wants. Declare and commit yourself to achieving what you know to be right for you. Do whatever valid and justified things are necessary to get the results you want.

THE NEXT SIX STEPS ARE NOT IN ORDERLY PROCESSION BUT ARE TO BE CONSTANT AND CONTINUING, DEVELOPED AS A GROWING WHOLE.

Step 5. Faith and trust: Believe you can change with God's help and trust Him to give you the continuous help you need.

Remember that it is a co-production, a joint work of yourself and God (2 Cor. 6:1-2). You cannot do it alone. God will not and cannot do it without your will and cooperation. Work out your own salvation and allow God to work in you according to His will to achieve His purpose in you (Phil. 2:12-13). Do not minimize the part you must play in your own development. People and circumstances will influence you, but you make the decision as to what you will actually do (Prov. 4:23).

You will be tempted, but you must choose for yourself to resist or avoid temptation. God makes a way for you to escape by giving you strength to resist or to endure trials and troubles and temptations (1 Cor. 10:13). But You choose either to take His way or go your own way. He does not promise to be with you if you go your own way.

Step 6. Study What the Bible Says About Your Habits and Practices.

Even Jesus overcame temptation by quoting scripture (Mt. 4:1-4, Luke 4:1-4). Those who do not know all that scripture contains must be willing to *search the scripture* (John 6:40, Acts 17:11) to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect

will of God.

The practice of the Psalmist is a good one for us to adopt. Psalm 119:11 – Thy word I have hidden in my heart (committed to memory) that I might not sin against Thee.

Paul's admonition is also pertinent. Phil. 4:6-9 – Do what you have heard from me and seen in me, and the God of peace will preserve you.

Step 7. Repent of Sin. Stop what is wrong, correct what is wrong. Seek forgiveness for any and every wrong thing.

A change of mind must precede a change of action. A change of mind and action are required before forgiveness is possible (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 8:22, 1 John 1:7-9).

Sin cannot be hidden from God. Sin is alive and well and bearing its proper fruit in one until God forgives it (Rom. 6:23).

We will probably never change until we make up our minds to take the way God requires and provides. Our part is as essential as His part.

Step 8. Develop a plan of action and implement it conscientiously.

Proverbs 14:22 – Plan to do good, not evil. One needs a plan if he is to succeed in service or in life (Luke 14:26-33). If you fail to plan it is like planning to fail.

In changing your life you must make a specific checklist of practical steps to take.

Step 9. Pray Regularly.

Prayer is essential in at least three ways: Prayer is essential in being a Christian, a child of God. A child of God must pray for forgiveness. Forgiveness is not automatic. Pray for God's help. One who is not a child of God, not doing what is required to be one, cannot expect God to accept his prayers and grant his requests (John 9:31).

God promises to hear and help His people (1 Pet. 5:7, Phil. 4:6-7, Eph. 6:22-28).

Step 10. Seek Help from Other Christians.

James 5:16 – Christians should confess their

faults to one another so they can pray for one another. We should bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).

When we are fighting an especially difficult habit, it may help to choose special counselors to monitor, advise, and encourage us.

We draw strength from public church meetings, from association and fellowship with others who are able to function with God's help and set an example for us (Heb. 10:24).

TWO ADDITIONAL MATTERS ARE NEEDED TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS.

Step 11. Be steadfast.

Life is not a sprint, it is a marathon that ends only at death (Rev. 2:10, 14:23). It is not a competition against others but only against one's own self. Fast and slow do not count. Steady, steadfast and faithful win the race.

It is not occasional spurts of penitence and reformation interspersed with occasional lapses and indulgences that God wants. If life ends during a time of indulgence and willful non-compliance with God's will, the result will be the same as for a life time of sin and disobedience. What you are when you cross your finish line determines your eternal condition. The best way – perhaps the only way – to avoid being caught unprepared and off-line at the end or at any time is to make and maintain preparation and stay on-line until the end.

Repeat: slow, steady, and faithful win the race. Diligently do what you know is right. Diligently avoid what you know is not right. Do nothing that is doubtful in your own mind until you have assured yourself it is right and proper (Rom. 14:22-23, 1 Thess. 5:21-22). Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work. Abundant, steadfast work is required to get a full reward (1 Cor. 15:58).

Make and maintain good habits. *Be doers of the word, not hearers only* (James 1:22-25). Habits are formed by repeated action. Eventually it becomes customary, "second-nature" for us. Change habits. Replace bad habits with good habits (Eph. 4:22-32). It is not enough just to cut off the old. One must

consciously put on the new.

Respond properly to temptation. We cannot avoid all temptation. It may not be possible to avoid all temptation. Be careful how you understand and pray that God will *lead us not into temptation* (Mt. 6:13). Do not blame God when you are tempted by evil (James 1:12-13).

If we pray this, surely we obligate ourselves to avoid people, places, and situations that tempt us. *Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill your own desires* (Rom. 13:14). *Evil company corrupts good habits*. "Do not be deceived" (1 Cor. 15:33). One should not think he can return to bad company without returning to bad habits. Changing habits will require changing your friends and associates – influencers who caused and still practice the habits or the places where the habit is still practiced.

Step 12. Be patient.

This overlaps the previous point about being steadfast, continuing in faithfulness (Rom. 2:7). We receive eternal life if we continue patiently in well doing. We must be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work (1 Cor. 15:58). Habits will not disappear overnight. Do not give up. Continue in well doing (Gal. 6:9).

An ancient Latin phrase *Carpe diem* can be an excellent motto: "Seize the day." Make the best use of available time and opportunity (Eph. 5:16, Col. 4:5), face things directly as they come, one day at a time – perhaps moment by moment (Mt. 6:3-34).

CONCLUSION:

1. Use all the means that God provides. Accept His motivation, guidance, and encouragement.
2. Determine that you will follow Him and stay in His way.
3. Seek forgiveness when you become aware you have made a misstep or a mistake.
4. God provides the tools. You must use them. What choice will you make?

DO WHAT YOU CAN WHILE YOU STILL CAN

CARPE DIEM! Seize the day.
Find the path. Walk in the way
The Lord has set for all, and pray
We will be able to obey
In everything the Lord may say.

What I can do the Savior knows.
Through Him succeeding power flows.
His grace and wisdom He bestows
Upon the faithful - knowledge grows.
His loving Spirit in me shows.

Seize the day! Taken action now.
When to the Lord you humbly bow,
Then He will help with when and how
And give you strength that will allow
You to fulfill and keep your vow.

I've failed to seize too many days.
Too much time not spent in praise,
Aimless, heedless of God's ways,
Content to bask in pleasure's haze
And blind to hell's impending blaze.

Seize the day and do not wait.
Walk in the way that's close and strait.
Do not trust destiny or fate
To bring you up to heaven's gate.
After today may be too late.

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The Weaker VESSEL

John Krivak

My wife is amazing. While I have pursued skills in understanding God's Word, she has paced along right beside me. I was the one privileged by academic study of the Bible, while she read select devotional books along with the Bible, over and over, in an annual plan. Advantage who? Advantage to me, would seem obvious. I enjoyed the very focused, linear approach to truth, backed by a library of scholarly books and journals. She took a different approach that was often more circumspect and comprehensive. From there, she was fully able to comprehend my most advanced reaches into deep, profound levels of knowledge and wisdom. No, more than that. She was able to sift through and find

the glitches in my writings and sermons. Her critiques, enabled by a highly developed intuition and spiritual perspective, were right on target. Even though she and I were different by gender with all that includes—from the obvious to the mysterious—we have become a perfect team under God.

But there is much more than spirituality, as described above. For a long span of time, I accepted the conventional wisdom that no woman could attain to the total accomplished life of the "Proverbs 31 woman." Wrong! I am married to that woman, and with deepest gratitude I celebrate her, in a life that she has richly blessed. Oh, and so far, that's 42 years together.

I have met my match! Or, in many ways, more than my equal. From this perspective, I will try to come to terms with the God-inspired words of the apostle Peter: *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker; since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered”* (1 Peter 3:7, NASB). In particular, he calls the wife “someone weaker” (the “weaker vessel” in literal translation). What weakness characterizes the wife?

Three affirmations of gender equality in the Bible.

First, both genders are created in God’s own image: *“God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (Gen. 1:27). Whatever Peter means by “weakness” must acknowledge this equality. It is built right in, through God’s creative design.

Secondly, the same equality extends into the domain marked out later in time by Christ Jesus: *“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise”* (Galatians 3:27–29). This Scripture is easily and often misunderstood. The three distinctions—of class, gender, and ethnicity—seem to be cancelled out, as though Jesus had abolished longstanding social structures. This has to be wrong, because these distinctions continue within Christianity under Paul’s direction. Social structures are not erased just because masters and slaves, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, become one in Christ Jesus.¹ Each pairing carries an imbalance of authori-

ty that prevents social equality. While many of us would happily welcome a restructuring towards equality, Paul plainly intends something else. What then?

Paul is looking back to the origination of the covenant with Abraham, with its long-awaited promise of blessing, so expansively inclusive, that it reaches entire humanity. At the start, the covenant was bound up with the requirement of physical circumcision—and this resulted in the limiting inequalities of status, gender, and ethnicity.² Fulfillment would answer the covenant promise only when the singular “seed of Abraham”—Christ Jesus!—arrived. Through baptism into Christ, the blessings in the Abrahamic covenant were no longer bound up with physical circumcision. To our present point, there is no longer Abrahamic distinction between men and women. In Jesus, they are equals in blessing. So are baptized masters and slaves, and baptized Jews and non-Jews. The full blessing of Abraham sheds the narrow exclusivism that was in place in earlier times within Judaism.

So, gender equality is stamped upon original creation, and also upon God’s work in Christ—new creation. Little wonder, thirdly, that the same parity will emerge vibrantly in the final stage of God’s new creation. We turn here to Peter (who identifies one gender as a “weaker vessel”). Men are to honor women *“as a fellow heir of the grace of life”* (3:7). Inheritance locks up, for some future time, all the blessings that Christians cannot receive until the final completion of God’s kingdom work in Christ Jesus. They receive the gift of the Spirit in advance, as the guarantee or down payment of their full inheritance (2 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:13–14). Christian women also receive the Spirit and are marked out with equal claim as heirs. In creation, in Christiani-

¹ Christianity, though it does not overthrow imbalanced social structures immediately and outright, does impact the inherent inequalities (of class, gender, ethnicity) in profound

ways. These social institutions, marked by inequality, will all be shaken and changed.

² Troy W. Martin, “The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antitheses in Galatians 3:28,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122-1 (Spring 2003): 111–125.

ty, and in final reward—equality takes in both genders.

Marriage—an unequal ordering of equals.

However, God has not regarded this essential equality as we might expect. The obvious ordering for equals would seem to be horizontal—with co-equal authority and status. Not so, God elevates the man to authority over the woman in an unbalanced hierarchy. This is plainly an unequal ordering of equals! And, like stacking marbles, the arrangement is obviously unstable. Man and woman will stay in order only by overriding their fundamental equality. This is precisely what Peter understands when he defines the wife as “the weaker vessel.” She is on the disadvantaged, disempowered side of the relationship. This is a vulnerable position, especially if the advantaged husband exploits the inequality.

Some interpreters have understood “weaker” in a physical sense. The man has physical superiority if the two settle their imbalance with a fight. While this physical disparity cannot be denied, there is no contextual pointer to this understanding. At best, God has matched the relational disparity in marriage with corresponding physical disparity. The obvious physical disparity becomes a visible demonstration of the relational imbalance, but Peter clearly speaks to the latter as the female weakness:

- *“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands” (3:1).*
- *“For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (3:5–6).*

Although she is every bit his equal, she is to take the submissive role and position. The prime driver for this is not the husband, but God: *“Your adornment...let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being*

submissive to their own husbands” (3:3–5). God has disadvantaged her, yet bestows the willingly vulnerable wife with His gratitude and praise. God has been honored when she accepts the weaker role that He marked out for her. In fair turnabout, she is honored by God for this.

And her husband? He may be tempted to think that his superiority is his own, rather than ordered (unfairly) by God. The man is in ready position to abuse and domineer, if that is how he should choose to exercise the advantage that he does not merit by any inherent superiority. If he is an irresponsible leader, his wife will suffer the injustice. Peter, to the contrary, calls the husband to a proper evaluation of the “unequal ordering of equals” that we call marriage. God honors the weak partner; so also must her advantaged partner: *“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.”* Abuse of man’s unearned authority will also hurt that husband. He will break his own connection to God. Treating the wife with honor (as befits an equal) is demanded, *“so that your prayers will not be hindered” (3:7).* God has no ear for the selfish husband. After all, he is given authority and leadership over a partner who is every bit his equal.

Why did God arrange marriage unequally?

So, God’s ordering of husband and wife is counterintuitive, unnatural, unstable, and even unfair³—when viewed in terms of their fundamental equality. Why, then? One important consideration is that God’s arrangement can hold together only if love of

³ We are ascribing unfairness to God only in the very restricted sense that the married equals are not treated equally. Yet we honor God as supremely fair when His larger purposes are considered. In a very analogous way, salvation of sinners by Jesus is inherently unfair: *“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust” (1 Peter 3:18).* Where is the fairness in that? In both cases, unfair suffering is answered by God as cause for greater honor—for the wife, as well as for the Savior.

highest quality is achieved. Without such love, the inequality will quickly drive wife and husband apart. We might speculate that God has ordered marriage to force urgency regarding love. Marriage, then, facilitates relational education, wisdom, and growth. Especially—by relating together, we learn powerful lessons through followership and leadership. God has made the home a school, and marriage is curriculum by which we learn to love.

A more conjectural speculation suggests that God has switched marital roles in a way opposite natural inclinations, for her and for him. Women may find it natural to domineer and control. Or, she may even be driven to this, while sensing the inherent unfairness of God's design. For their part, men may fail to be naturally effective and responsible leaders. Advantaged with authority that he never had to earn or merit, husbands can quite easily fall into the role of lazy abusers. Of course, these are—at best—generalizations. Some exceptional men and women may settle quite comfortably into gender roles arranged by God. Yet, these dysfunctions may just as easily result if Peter's inspired guidance is not followed. We may be forced by natural inclinations to learn the hard way.

Yet another consideration should be given attention, and it draws upon the love education previously discussed. This notion arises when we consider another place where we find an "unequal ordering of equals"—the Trinity! Father, Son, and Spirit enjoy a profound equality (oneness) in shared divinity. They share an eternally successful relationship that builds itself on truest faithfulness and strongest love. And yet, the Three submit to one another. This Scripture is the strongest demonstration of inner-Trinity relating:

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself

by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"

(Philippians 2:5–8).

Here, Jesus has willingly become "the weaker vessel"! He has taken a position in the Trinity that is analogous to the wife's position in marriage—a vulnerability that God will supremely honor. As in 1 Peter 3, Christians are to accept the vulnerable position in relationship to people and to God. They are to have, in themselves, the attitude that Jesus demonstrated by taking the Cross.

Marriage may be designed—not simply to teach us about our deepest selves—but to teach us the deepest truths about God. Our marriages become living parables that display the relational dynamics that order the Trinity. Just as the Three become One; the two also become one. In this perspective, the disadvantaged wife is joined by the crucified Christ Jesus as "the weaker vessel." He shares her role as the co-equal one under submission. Her husband has been honored by God with the leadership role, yet she is more greatly honored by solidarity with Jesus.⁴ Since marriage and Christianity both are covenants, they are co-instructive—relational skills and wisdom, learned in one covenant, may be directly put to work in the other. In relation to God, each of us falls into the role of "weaker vessel." This is what C. S. Lewis⁵ meant when he declared: "...for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him."

⁴ It should be noted, simultaneously, that Jesus joins both wife and husband in their unequal roles. With her, He also is the "weak vessel." Also with him, Jesus is "one having authority" (John 13:13ff.). Like the perceptive centurion declared about himself, Jesus is both "in authority" and "under authority": "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it" (Luke 7:8). Thus, Jesus is fit to model relational functioning for each spouse.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, in his essay, "Priestesses in the Church?", in *God In The Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 239.

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HOW I GOT OUT OF THE MAZE OF SECTARIANISM (OR WHY I REJECTED DENOMINATIONALISM)

J. Ira Jones

[Note: Brother Jones is one of those men who lived in both the 1800s and 1900s. His sincere desire to know the truth, and his willingness to study to find it caused him to reject denominationalism. I hope you enjoy reading his first-hand account of how he finally found the true church.]

In order to properly introduce my religious experience or *how I came out of the maze of sectarianism* it will be necessary to go back to the years of my boyhood. Because of many misfortunes my parents were reduced almost to poverty and when about twelve years of age it became necessary for me to battle with the world and look after the means for my own support. And for the next seven or eight years I had but very little or no connection with religious services and was seldom under religious influences; but after the seven or eight years I had finished an apprenticeship as a mechanic and became a contractor and builder at the early age of nineteen; during that year I was thoroughly convinced that the life I had been leading was not the kind of a life that one should live, and that in order to associate with the class of society I desired it was necessary for me to live a better life.

I had made some study of the church and its influence with the world and came to the conclusion that the proper place for me was in the church. I began attending a protracted meeting in progress at the M. E. Church and on Wednesday night of the second week I answered the invitation and went forward to the altar. After remaining there for some two or three hours, through the prayers and appeals

of the pastor and stewards and class-leaders of the church, the pastor finally reached the conclusion that there was something that I was not willing to give up, and because of this fact God was not willing to receive me. I arose from the altar and went away feeling about as sad as ever I had felt in my life. I thought certainly I must be very bad if I am so far gone that God is not willing to have anything to do with me, but I was determined that I would try it again. So, on the following evening, I responded to the first invitation and went forward again to the altar. During the time I was there several expressed themselves as having received the blessing and arose, but I remained there without the blessing still. They dismissed the evening services and a few of them remained to pray with me.

I thought the matter over very seriously, and after considerable deliberation upon the subject I resolved that I would talk it over with the preacher. He had asked me a number of times how I felt and so I arose and sat down with the preacher and the others who remained with me, and told them my feeling. I said to them: "Last night before I came here to this place I was conscious of my sinfulness and believed that I should be a better man. I came here determined to do what is necessary to be done in order that I may be a better man. I had a very strong determination last night, but I do not feel so well to-night. You said last night that because I had something which I was not willing to give up, God was not willing to receive me; to-night I want to say that I have resigned everything as far as I know. I do

not keep one thing back. I am willing to do anything that is right in order that I may be what I ought to be. Last night you said that God was not willing to receive me; to-night I will say this, I am willing to do anything that is necessary to be done, and if God is not willing to receive me on that proposition he never will be, for I do not intend to come back here to this mourner's bench anymore."

In consequence of this little speech that was made, the pastor and the officers of the church departed a short distance and had a little conference with one another regarding my case, and from their report when they returned I inferred that they had discussed the matter considering me favorably. The pastor said, "Well, Bro. Jones, perhaps we misunderstood you, perhaps you have a peculiar case, and in consequence of that we have decided to take you in on probation." Not having had the religious training of the average boy, I was somewhat curious to know what they meant by probation. They said: "That means that we shall take you in on trial. It is one of the rules of the church to take you in on trial for a period of time, say perhaps six months, and if you prove to be all right at the end of that period, we will take you into full fellowship with the church."

I said to him, "Is God willing to receive me, do you think?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do you think he is willing to receive me right now?"

"Yes," said he.

"Well, then," said I, "I guess I will not unite with this church."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I do not care to join a church that is going to cost me more than to get into heaven."

They said, "What makes you think that?"

My answer was, "If God is willing to receive me, and he is willing to receive me right now, and the church does not want to receive me for six months, it certainly seems to cost more to get into the membership of this church than it does to get into heaven."

"Well," said the pastor, "what do you want?"

I answered him, "I want to join the church right now."

"Well," said he, "that is not according to the rules of the church."

I answered, "That may be true; I do not ask you to discard any of your rules, or violate any of them; I will go and join another church."

They had another short conference among themselves, and decided to drop the matter of probation and take me in on the following Sunday, but said he, "First it will be necessary for you to be baptized."

"All right; if that is necessary, I am perfectly willing to do what is necessary, but I do not want to do unreasonable things."

Between this time and the following Sunday the pastor came to me and said, "Now, Bro. Jones, you are to be baptized on next Sunday, and the question is, how do you want to be baptized?"

I said to him, "I do not know as to the matter of how. What do you mean by it?"

He said, "There are three modes of baptism: you can be sprinkled, you can be poured, or you can be immersed."

I said to him, "What does baptism amount to? Tell me that, and I will tell you what my choice is."

He answered me, "Baptism is only for the answering of a good conscience; whatever is required to answer your conscience is all that is demanded. If sprinkling will answer your conscience, all right; if pouring, that is the thing to do; but if nothing but immersion will satisfy your conscience, then, that is the thing to do—be immersed."

After some thought on the matter for a few moments, in which I considered the inconvenience of being immersed, and also that of myself as standing there and having him pour water on my head, I reached the conclusion that I did not have much conscience to satisfy, and that a few drops of water would be just as good as a pitcher full, or even the river. So I decided I would be sprinkled on Sunday morning. So in due form and ceremony I was sprinkled on Sunday morning and was taken into full fellowship with the church.

I then began to study the New Testament. I began to read the first chapter of Matthew, and thought I would read it through. I reached the third chapter of Matthew, and there read the record of where Jesus came from Galilee down to the Jordan, to be baptized by John in the Jordan. I read of how the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove, and how the voice of God acknowledged Jesus as his beloved Son in whom he was well pleased. I thought if God was pleased with Jesus, who was my Savior, to do this thing and Jesus was pleased to do it in this way, would not God also be pleased with me to do the same thing in the same way?

I went back to my pastor and said to him, "Did you not tell me that baptism is for the answering of a good conscience?" and he replied, "Yes; that is what I said." "Then," said I, "I want to be baptized some more." "Why, what is the matter?" said he.

I referred him to the reading of the third chapter of Matthew, and told him that I had now more conscience than I had when I was baptized, and demanded more baptism to satisfy it.

Said he, "Do you suppose that I can baptize, you every time that you get a little more conscience?"

I answered him, "Yes; that is according to your statement. If baptism is for the answering of a good conscience, and that is all you said it is for, then surely you can baptize me to satisfy all the good conscience I have now or ever will have. '

"Well," said he, "perhaps you have found a point, and you seem to think that is all there is to it; go back and read some more, and you will come out all right."

I went back and read again.

Soon after I united with the Methodist Church at this place I also united in marriage with a young lady who was also a member of the same church. About a year after our marriage a little girl came to bless our home, and when she was about six weeks of age the same pastor came to me and asked that I bring the child to the church and have it baptized.

I said to him, "What for? Have you found something more in baptism than when you baptized me?"

Said he, "No, not necessarily."

"Well," I answered, "how can you then baptize my baby? Did you not tell me at the time when you baptized me that baptism was only for the answering of a good conscience?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you not also tell me at the time when you baptized me that the candidate is the one to choose the mode of baptism?"

"I think I did."

"Well, then, how can you baptize my baby? First, you cannot baptize my baby for the answering of a good conscience because it is not old enough to have any conscience at all. Second, if the candidate is the one to choose the mode, that also would disqualify it, because it has not the power of choice. It does not know its fight hand from its left, and it has to take whatever is given it regardless of what it may be. And more than that, in regard to this matter of baptism or the use of water, I am satisfied that if it had the power to express any desire at all, it would choose none whatever, from the fact that it cries every time its mother puts any water on it."

"Well," said the pastor, "Bro. Jones, would you stand between your child and the kingdom of heaven?"

I said, "God forbid."

He said to me, "Does not the Scripture teach, 'Suffer the little ones and forbid them not to come unto me '?"

I answered, "I believe it does."

"Well, you are standing between your child and the kingdom of heaven, refusing to permit it to come to Jesus."

I said to him, "My dear brother, I cannot believe you dishonest; I can hardly believe that you are trying to deceive me, but I must assure you that you are not dealing with one as ignorant of the teaching of the Scripture now as when you baptized me. You asked me to read, and I have read, and I have not read in vain. Let me quote you the remaining part of that verse which you quoted part of. 'Jesus said, Suffer the little ones, and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such *is the kingdom of heaven.* '

“In plain English this verse teaches me that the child is already material for the kingdom of heaven, and in the chapter just before this one I find where his followers had been wrangling among themselves as to which would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. He called a child up and set it in the midst of them and said to them, ‘Except you be converted and become as this little child, you shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven, but whoso humbleth himself and becometh as this little child the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’ Now, I understand that nothing can be greater than the greatest. If to become like a little child is to make me the greatest, then the child itself must be the greatest. And if a thing that is already greatest is changed at all, it is made less because of the fact that it cannot be made more.”

He turned away from me in a rage, and said, “There is no use fooling with you,” and went and reported me to the officers of the church as a heretic and said I had fallen from grace. This was verily the end of my experience with the Methodist Church, especially as a member of it, because, when the matter was presented to me and I was called to give an account of my treatment of the pastor, I renounced the whole institution, with all of its workings, and turned out into the world a rank infidel.

I turned from my experience with the Methodist Church to the reading of Tom Paine, Bob Ingersoll and other writings among the infidels. Yet I must confess in all my reading of the infidels I found no satisfaction for my soul. After something like three years of this kind of living, believing or trying to believe there was none good, no, not one, in all of those who professed to be the followers of Christ, I had to decide the question of life with or without the church again.

While I was living in the city of Washington, la., in the winter of 1892, two ministers came into the city and rented an old opera-house and began a protracted meeting! My father had always been a Baptist; mother had been a member of the United Brethren Church. Father had been a very strict close-communions, and had looked upon all others as

more or less hopeless. However, when these two ministers came to town, he came to me and said, “Son, there are two old Campbellite preachers in town who have rented Everson’s old opera-house and will begin a protracted meeting to-night. Let’s go down and hear what they have to say.” My curiosity had been aroused by many remarks I had heard regarding the Campbellites and their many peculiarities of belief and practices, and so I was determined to go and hear what those preachers had to say, and see what kind of a people they were.

I attended the meeting nearly four weeks, every night. During the course of the meetings, at the conclusion of one of the sermons, in the invitation one of the evangelists said (G. L. Brokaw, then State evangelist of Iowa), “We invite you to come and take the word of God as your only rule of faith and practice, to believe what it teaches you, do what it tells you to do the way it tells you to do it, and be what it makes of you.” That appealed to me more than anything I had ever heard before. When I had turned away from the Methodist Church, I had resolved that if ever I found a man or any number of men who took the Bible, and the Bible only, as their rule of faith and practice for life, that they will count me as one of their number. I had so expressed myself to my father many times after quitting the Methodists, and on this particular evening, as we went home from the meeting, he said to me, “My son, did you notice the remark of the evangelist to-night?”

I said, “Yes, sir, I did.”

“Do you not then think that you have found your partners?”

I answered him, “Perhaps I have, but I was hoodwinked once, and I am not going to be in a hurry again. I am taking plenty of time to study upon this question, and if, after a while, I find that they mean what they say, I will consider them favorably.” During the four weeks of meetings my father and my mother both united with this new organization as charter members. The new organization was instituted with forty-five members; one of the ministers, J. M. Atwater, was employed as pastor. After

the organization had been running until September, 1893, P. D. Holloway, of Keosauqua, Ia., was employed to hold a meeting.

During the eight months or more of the pastorate of Bro. Atwater he had spent a great deal of time at my home. I had talked with him many times regarding the teaching of the Scriptures, regarding Christian life, and always in answer to my question he referred me to what the Bible says: "It is not what I think or what some other man thinks or what someone has written in some little book, but thus saith the Lord," and that gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

During this time I was thoroughly convinced that I had found my ideal. So on the third Sunday in September, 1893, during the meeting of Bro. Holloway, I was buried with the Lord in baptism. At

that time I had under contract several large buildings and employed several mechanics, but I resolved to give up all and follow the Savior. I had found and told to others the good news of salvation through Christ. With this determination, I closed out my business, signed over work to be done the following year to two of my apprentices who had served their time, and I landed in the city of Des Moines, Ia., and entered school at Drake University Jan. 16, 1894, to prepare for the ministry. I will have been telling the old, old story ten years next Easter Sunday. While I cannot boast of great success in numbers of conversions, yet several hundred have come to Christ under my ministry. Last year I was State evangelist of Kansas; am now located as minister of the church at Burlington, Kan., and am more firm in the plea of Christ and his apostles than ever.

What is Your Favorite Verse?

Curtis Hartshorn

Do you have a favorite verse in the Bible? Saying you have a lot of favorites is cool in a way, but they can't all be your favorites. I know because that's how I am. I have lots of verses I really, really like, that have a special message for me, some even a special memory for me.

Those who know me know I love Revelation and Nehemiah. Romans 1:18-20 played a big part in my conversion. I have some favorites in Acts and James. But if you pinned me down on my all-time favorite over 43 years of being a Christian, it would have to be Matthew 13:44.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

This is the one I keep coming back to when people ask me, "What's your favorite verse?" I don't know what it is other than that I love the parables.

This is a one verse parable. It gets right to the

heart of the matter. It makes me think about how crazy it looks to most people that we sacrifice so much for the kingdom. We go to church and pray and read our Bibles and put money in the offering. From the outside it looks like a waste, but that's because people don't see the treasure hidden in the field. It seems crazy for someone to sell all that they have to buy a vacant lot which looks worthless to them. If they only understood the valuable treasure buried in that field.

This verse reminds me that there is a treasure in being a Christian, which far outweighs the riches and the pleasure this world has to offer. It is worth the scorn and ridicule that I have faced over the years. This verse reminds me I sold all I had. I bought the field.

What's your favorite verse?



HE REMOVED THE STING

Johnny O. Trail

A few weeks ago, I preached at a gospel meeting in the congregation I was baptized in and attended as a young person. This congregation, the Lumley Stand church of Christ, has many people that I am related to and several of them knew my grandparents, aunts, and uncles. In many respects, this meeting was a wonderful opportunity to visit with people instrumental in my spiritual training.

One gentleman who attended the meeting told me that he had purchased my Uncle Wilburn's old Allis-Chalmers D-17, orange, and white tractor. He sent me pictures of the tractor in a newly restored condition, and it brought back many memories—every one of them good with one notable exception.

When I was a small child my father and various uncles hauled hay using this very tractor and a hay wagon. They had exhausted the various barns and spaces available for storing hay and obtained permission to use a barely standing farmhouse in the Gnat Hill community for storing the remnants of their hay crop.

When they entered the building, they encountered on major problem—paper wasps had taken up residence in a major way in the former family dwelling place. Some suggested burning the wasps out, but that was quickly decided against since it would cause the entire structure to become engulfed in flame. So, the decision was made to knock the nests down and stomp the former residents to death.

Sadly, some of the enraged wasps escaped the “boot of doom.” For whatever reason, the ones who escaped found me seated on my uncle's tractor on the outside of the old farmhouse. If memory serves me correctly, I was not even close to the entrances

of the house, but they seemed to especially dislike me! Their stings were very painful, and I responded by screaming and crying out for some help. As I remember, I could not have been very much over five years of age.

When my father heard my cries, he ran out of the house, grabbed them with his bare hands, and crushed them. The stings had to hurt his hand, but that did not deter him from saving me from multiple wasp stings. As he crushed them with his bare hands, he opened them up and said, “See, they are dead, and they can never hurt you again.” I never forgot his actions, and his nurture throughout my life. He was, in many respects, my hero.

As I reflect upon these things I am invariably reminded of the words of Paul regarding the price that Christ paid to remove the sting of death. He says, in 1 Corinthians 15:53-57,

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 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, WHERE 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.”

I feel certain that the wasps stinging my father's hand were a small price to pay for making sure his five-year-old son was not hurt or stung any more by these vile insects. Although there are extreme differences in the nature of the pain endured, Christ

willingly died at Golgotha in an exceedingly torturous manner so humankind could escape the pain of death reserved for Satan and his minions (Revelation 21:8). For this and other reasons, Christ is the greatest hero in my life and in the lives of all the faithful.

Jesus died for sinful human beings and took the sins of the world upon Him even though He was not guilty of wrongdoing. Romans 5:6-8 says,

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

It is not fair that the sinless, perfect Son of God died for the potential redemption of humankind through obedience to the gospel (Hebrews 5:8), but He was willing to do this to save the souls of men from a terrible fate—Gehenna hell. The death of Jesus should underscore how terrible hell must be. The greatest that Heaven had to offer, Jesus Christ, was willing to die in a horrible manner to save us

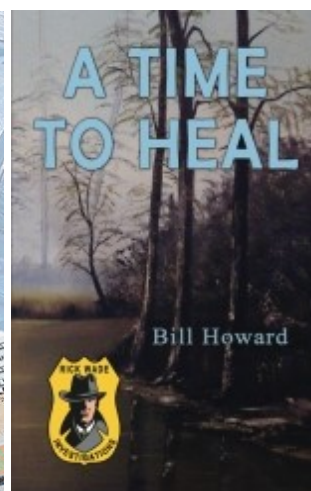
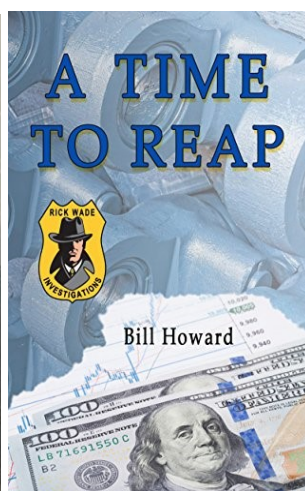
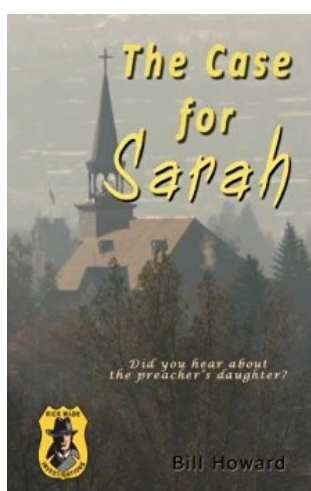
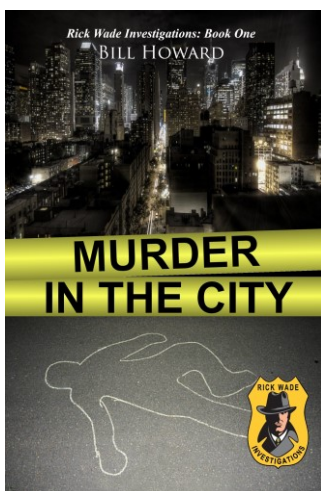
from the worst fate ever designed.

All of this was accomplished so that death and sin would have no power over God’s faithful and obedient children. 2 Timothy 1:7-10 says,

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

The tomb, the grave, the vault, and all other manners of interment cannot possibly withhold the faithful child of God from being resurrected. He took the “sting” away, and it has no power over the faithful (Revelation 2:10).

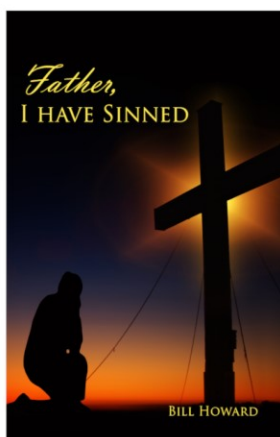
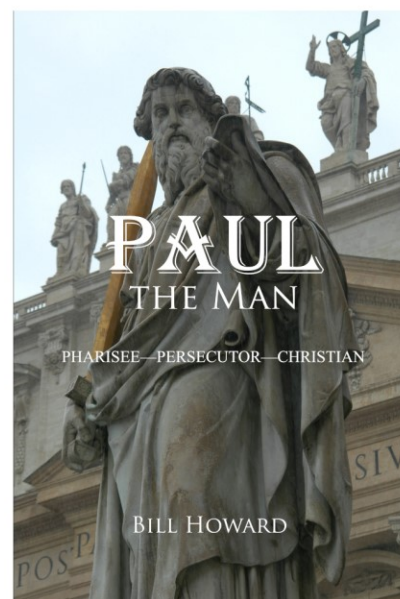
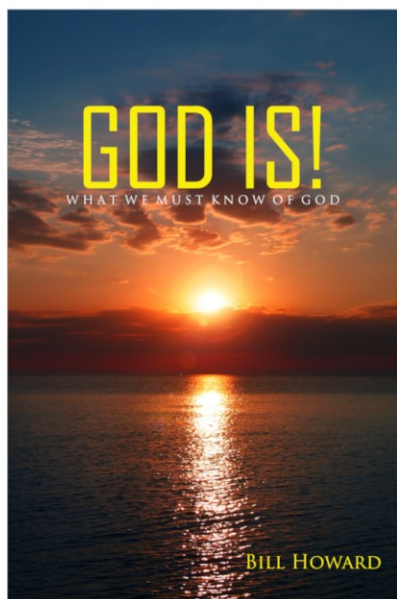
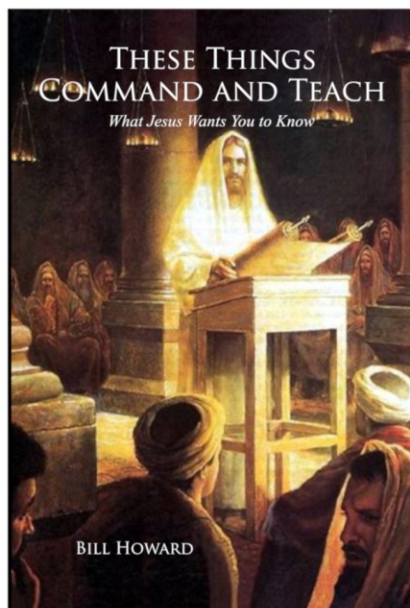
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QUOTES TO CONTEMPLATE

On Living Christ

One bearing the banner of God's family but living as the nephew of the devil will never lead anyone to Christ.

Bill Howard
Love/Life (2023)

On Methodist Authority

But O! we come at last to the most weighty subject, *even* the *Divine* government, the authenticity of which is denied by the *Proctor*; who compiled the Bishop's [Francis Asbury] materials! I repeat it, the sufficiency of the *Scripture* government is flatly denied! See page 54. "The New Testament shall be the guide," as I say. He affirms, it will not do! "It is in vain (as he saith) to argue against human heads and human institutions, and to recommend the Bible only as a standard," &c. Then he reasons against the Bible, as being insufficient to govern the Church. In page 55th, he seems to think the Holy Ghost "never designed the Scripture for a system of discipline and government in the Church, without the *agency* of *human* wisdom," &c. He thinks if the Scripture had been designed for our government, "it would have had eyes, ears, and a voice!"

James O'Kelly
Vindication of an Apology

On "Dandy" Preachers

The young preacher, whose circumstances will permit him to dress finely, should yet be in dress a model of simplicity and purity. He should scrupulously refrain from every thing gaudy and showy. Let his necktie be of modest black, his other clothes of grave allowable color, and perfectly plain; let all gold chains, gold seals, and costly pins be kept completely out of sight; nor even so much as the plainest ring be seen on his hand. Sectarian preachers can afford to sport these trinkets. For the most

part they are propagandists of the heresies of the great Mother of harlots; and there is perfect consistency between such gewgaws and their calling. But on the person of the conscientious and humble preacher of the primitive gospel they are strikingly out of place. It will be well, too, even for the young preacher who can afford something costlier, to provide himself with a plain silver watch. The silver is just as enduring as the gold, is unostentatious, and comports better than a more glittering thing with the deeply serious work in which he is engaged. Especially must I guard my young preaching brother against imitating the studied carelessness and slipthrift manner of a certain type of dandies. The wristband is worn unfastened and allowed to dangle about the hand; the vest is left unbuttoned; the hat is slouched and sits jauntily on the head; the shoe is untied; or the watch-key depends from a tow string. All this is not only in bad taste, but indicates a worldly state of mind wholly at variance with the purity and spirituality of Christianity, and hence with the sacred calling of the preacher. To play the dandy even by accident is utterly unallowable in him who serves in the things of the Spirit. He must scrupulously guard against gliding into such unpreacherly ways.

Moses E. Lard
Lard's Quarterly (Vol. 2)

On a Closer Relationship with God

Seeking *diligently* is the beginning process for developing a relationship with God that is unmistakably one of passion.

Danny Davis,
Closer to God (2022)

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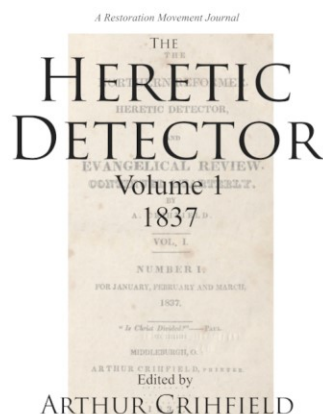
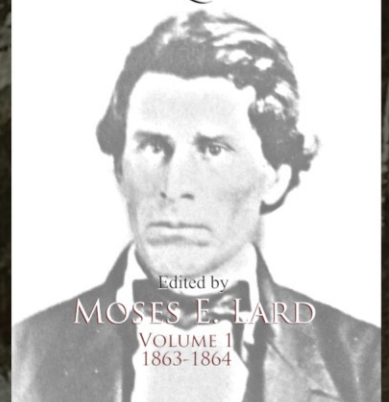
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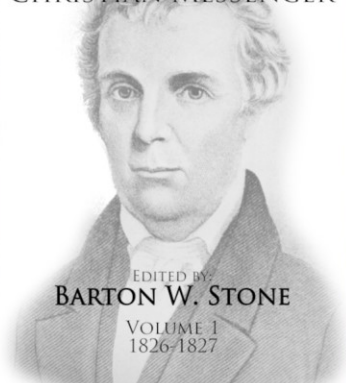
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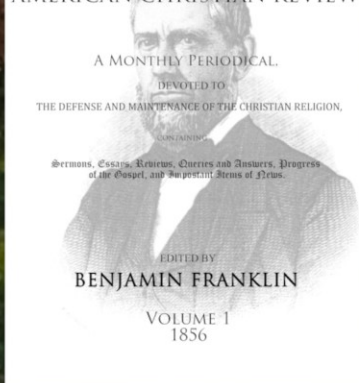
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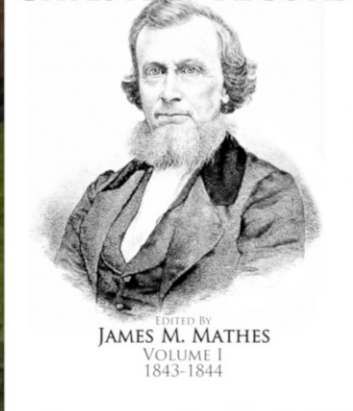
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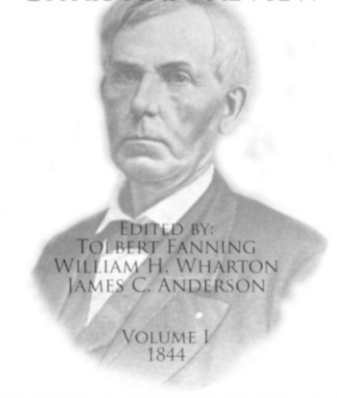
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Where do Mistakes Go When You Rub Them Out?



Raymond Elliot

The title of this article was the caption under a picture in a comic strip. The scene depicts a young girl sitting at her desk with a pencil in her hand. She had made a mistake in spelling a word and had erased the letter. At this point she asks her teacher, “Where do mistakes go when you rub them out?”

Now, that is a pretty good question. My thoughts immediately turned to the mistakes we all make in life. Some mistakes are not always sinful; however, all of our sins would indeed be mistakes. Sin is a transgression of God’s law; sin is unrighteousness; sin is a failure to comply with the commands of God (I John 3:4; 5:17; James 4:17). Sin is universal in scope: “There is none righteous, no, not one... For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 23 ASV). When a person complies with the terms of pardon presented by the Christ,

forgiveness can be obtained. “In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

When sin appears as a debt, an unfilled obligation, then pardon is spoken of as a canceling. “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgression for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins.” (Isaiah 43:25). “Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19). Jesus canceled out our debt of sin on Calvary when he shed his atoning blood for us

When sin appears as an estrangement from God, then forgiveness is represented as reconciliation. Man’s sins separated him from his God (Isaiah 59:1-2). But God has made it possible for fallen men to be reconciled to Him through his Son Jesus Christ.

This was the message of reconciliation proclaimed by the inspired preachers in the first century (II Corinthians 5:18-20). It is in the body (church) of Jesus that both Jew and Gentile can enjoy friendship once again with the Heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:18).

When sin appears as an indictment, forgiveness is spoken of as a justification. Paul expressed it in this manner: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). To be justified is to be declared guiltless, to be absolved of any wrongdoing, to be acquitted, to make or to be declared right. The whole world has been indicted by the court of heaven as being under sin (Romans 3:19). To be set free from the guilt and bondage of sin, justification must be sought in Jesus Christ.

When sin appears as pollution, forgiveness is represented as a cleansing. Zechariah prophesied; "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zechariah 13:1). The apostle John spoke of the savior when he wrote, "...unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5). Jesus himself declared as he instituted the supper, "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). That fountain which was opened was the side of our Lord from whence flowed His atoning blood.

When sin appears as a disease, forgiveness is represented as a healing. In reference to the coming Messiah, Isaiah wrote: "But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). In the New Testament, we learn of the work of the Great Physician, "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sin, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes we are healed" (I Peter 2:24). There is a balm in Gilead; there is a physician there. Jesus Christ is the healer of the malady of sin (Jeremiah 8:22; Matthew 9:12, 13).

Where do our sins go when they are forgiven? That too is a most difficult question. However the word of God does offer us some understanding on this subject. Take for instance the passage found in Micah 7:19: "He will again have compassion upon us: he will tread our iniquities under foot; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Sin in this verse is regarded as a personal enemy which by God's sovereign grace will be entirely subdued. As God destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, so shall he cast our sins into the depths of the sea of forgiveness and forgetfulness (Exodus 15:4, 10). If you will observe, the Lord will cast our sins into the "depths of the sea," and not near the shore where they can be washed back again. In Psalms 103:12, we learn, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

In reference to the new covenant that God would make with Israel and Judah, the promise was made: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). Thus we learn that the Infinite Intelligence possesses the attribute of forgetting sins that are forgiven. To some degree we understand how this is possible. Loving parents have often forgotten as well as forgiven the mistakes and sins committed by their children. In perfection, our Heavenly Father forgives and forgets the sins of His penitent children (I John 1:7, 9).

My friends, if you have not had your sins blotted out by the blood of Christ, please, as a penitent believer, be immersed in His name in order to obtain His divine forgiveness (Acts 3:19; 2:38). And God who forgives will also in His mercy forget your transgressions.

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THE MANICHEANS

Kyle D. Frank

In Acts, Paul warns the Ephesian elders, whom he had called to Miletus. He tells them:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Acts 20:28-30 ESV

This is a most grave situation that we, being so far in the future, can look back and see. This charge really did happen. There really were grievous wolves and we can see what these horrendous people did. Now, in relation to this, we can look at some of the “wolves” who came later who surely did prey on the Lord’s flock. In this article, we will deal with the wolf whose followers were called Manicheans.

Mani, (AD 216-76) also known as Manes, was a Persian born in the Mesopotamian region. As was with the lives of all ancient heretics, so it is with Mani—the actual details suffered greatly at the hands of the “orthodox” leaders of the church. In regards to Mani, the trouble is magnified by the fact that there are 2 separate accounts of his life from the eastern and western churches.

The earliest account of him is from Eusebius (Book vii.31) who describes him as:

“a barbarian in both speech and conduct, who attempted to form himself into a Christ, and then also proclaimed himself to be the very Paraclete and the Holy Spirit.¹ Then, as if he

were Christ, he selected twelve disciples, the partners of his new religion, and after patching together false and ungodly doctrines, collected from a thousand heresies long since extinct, he swept like a deadly poison, from Persia, upon this part of the world.”

Other sources of those days say that he was descended from a Magian family and was proficient in Greek, music, mathematics, geography, astronomy, painting, medicine etc. Apparently, according to these chaps, he was a well-rounded, well-educated lad. He was designated as a “priest” of those days. This was in the days before he went off the religious “deep-end.” He taught his views to a fellow named Sapor. Apparently, Sapor was well respected and had connections, because when he learned Mani’s views were considered heretical, Mani was forced to flee in order to preserve his life. Heretics often were forced to run to stay ahead of those whose views were considered “orthodox.” Apparently, harboring heretical views could cost you your life as well as your soul in those days. In fleeing from Sapor, Mani found himself in what we now know as Turkestan, where he was able to gather a good number of disciples. He also used his talents to adorn a temple with his paintings and produced his gospel

Sources:

Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity
A Dictionary of Early Christian Biography—Edited
by Henry Wace & W.C. Piercy
Ecclesiastical History—Eusebius
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¹ A “paraclete” is an advocate, one called for support or aid, thus is is occasionally translated “counsellor.”

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH LEADS TO

Fellowship

Jake Schotter

The church is not a social club, community center, theater, or any other man-made association. The church is the establishment of God (Matthew 16:18) and as such, it is His family (Ephesians 5:22-23; Revelation 19:7-8; 21:2), temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:21-22), flock (John 10:1-18), the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), and an assembly (1 Corinthians 1:2). The church transcends time (Titus 1:2), ethnicity (Revelation 7:9-10), and geography. The fellowship of fellow believers is the will of God (John 17:20-21). This is shared with God (1 John 1:3) and with one another (Galatians 2:9; 1 John 1:3, 7; Hebrews 10:25). The most vivid example of an exemplary church is in Acts 2:42-47 whereas the Corinthian church was beleaguered with problems.

Whether or not we are the church from Pentecost or the church at Corinth, fellowship does not exist because a group desires to be together and united in the Gospel. The church in Ephesus was told to be

united together because of the work of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:14-18). Since Christ unites us together (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 11:24; 1 Corinthians 12:13), we are not a human association. However, because we have been purchased at great cost (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19), we have this in common and share in this reality together (2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 8:17).

How do we react to the identity of the church? We “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). One day in the future, we know “When He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). Church leaders, like Paul, are “in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). Therefore, the identity of the church demands relationships and fellowship. We are certain to do this in the future, why not participate in this life together... in this life?

About the AUTHORS

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.

Raymond Elliot and his precious wife, Virginia, are both 88 years old and have been married 68 years. He says: "We are thankful for God's grace and providence in our lives. We attended Alabama Christian College in Montgomery, AL. I began 'full-time' work in 1958 with various churches of Christ, mainly in central and southeast Alabama with the exception of two years in Savannah, GA. We now live in Prattville, AL where I preached nearly seventeen years. I have been blessed by congregations since I left 'full time' work in 2004 by using me to preach part time and fill in work. I am semi-retired but I teach Bible classes in Guyana, SA over Skype and Zoom. I write articles. Due to health, I no longer preach, do teach Bible class occasionally. I serve on the Board of Regents of Amridge University (formerly Southern Christian University) in Mont-

gomery, AL. I must confess that I was an addict, that is, to deer and turkey hunting for 42 years! In closing, I leave you with this bit of philosophy: Remember that wherever you go, there you are."

Hugh Fulford is a long-time gospel preacher who has spoken on many lectureships, does many meetings, and has been a regular writer in publications like *Spiritual Sword*.

Curtis Hartshorn preaches in Checota, OK, works with BibleTalk.tv, and loves to help Christians strengthen their faith.

Bill Howard is a former elder, preacher, and restaurateur who spends his "retired" time writing detective novels and study books for new Christians, as well as encouraging others.

J. Ira Jones was a preacher in the late 1800s/early 1900s whose conversion story is in this very issue!

Roy Knight is a Christian Gentleman (and has a podcast with that very name), who has preached for the St. George (SC) church of Christ for 25 years. He is the author of a commentary on John, as well as two collections of fantastic devotionals, *There is a River* (Volumes 1 and 2).

John Krivak is a constant student of the Bible and church history, especially the Restoration Movement and Alexander Campbell. He studied

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Jim Mitchell preaches in Oklahoma City, and travels the country, teaching people how to use the Open Bible Study method to bring people to Jesus.

Caleb Robertson works with the Martinsville church of Christ as a host of the television/YouTube broadcast, “What does the Bible Say?” He also writes The Informer, a page and a half bible article, every Sunday.

Charles R. Rose was born in a small farmhouse in the rural community of Red Oak, north of Marshall, Arkansas on September 21, 1942, and was educated in the public schools of Arkansas. He was baptized October 15, 1967 at Clinton, Arkansas by Brother Jimmy Duncan. Charles and his wife Lois have three grown children, and four grandchildren. He preached for small congregations in the hills of Arkansas, his first full-time work being at Saint Joe. He has served churches of Christ at Saint Joe, Western Grove, and Northfork, Arkansas, Mexico, Leesville and Lincoln, Missouri. He has worked with the Lincoln congregation 35 years. Although semi-retired, he still does their radio and media work. The present program airs on 97.1 FM from Warsaw, Missouri and is in its 34th year of broadcasting. His writings have appeared in Four State Gospel News, World Evangelist, Voice of Truth International, and many church bulletins. He has preached numerous gospel meetings in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Kansas. He may be reached at crrose@iland.net.

Jake Schotter, a resident of Henderson, Tennessee, has been preaching the Gospel since he was 9 years old and recently finished his first year of full-time work. He recently graduated from Freed-Hardeman University with a B.A. in Biblical Studies with an emphasis in preaching. He preaches for the church of Christ in Bolivar, Tennessee. He can be contacted at jakeschotter@gmail.com.

Matthew Shaffer used to live in Brazil... Indiana. He has since left the country. He has been mar-

ried to Japonica for two years. He studied German and Classical Greek at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. He is presently pursuing a degree in Archaeology in Great Britain, and is the new editor of the *Scripture Standard*, a paper from our brethren in England.

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

John Augustus Williams served as president for Christian College, as a professor at Kentucky University, and was a preacher for many decades. His “Life of Elder Raccoon John Smith” has been a favorite of Restoration Movement enthusiasts for over 100 years.

Bradley S. Cobb enjoys purchasing vintage (i.e., 1940s) radios, but hasn’t figured out how to make them fit in his house, so he is learning how to turn them into snazzy bookshelves. He is thankful for the great garden God blessed them with, but is at a loss for how to deal with 300+ green tomatoes.

