A Magazine for the church of Christ

The Quarterly

Vol. 8, No. 1

Why Don't Jesus' Genealogies Match?

Don't be a Dead Squirrel

Some Will Depart

Tanks, Banks, and Temples

What the Bible Teaches About Church Discipline

Open My Eyes that I May See

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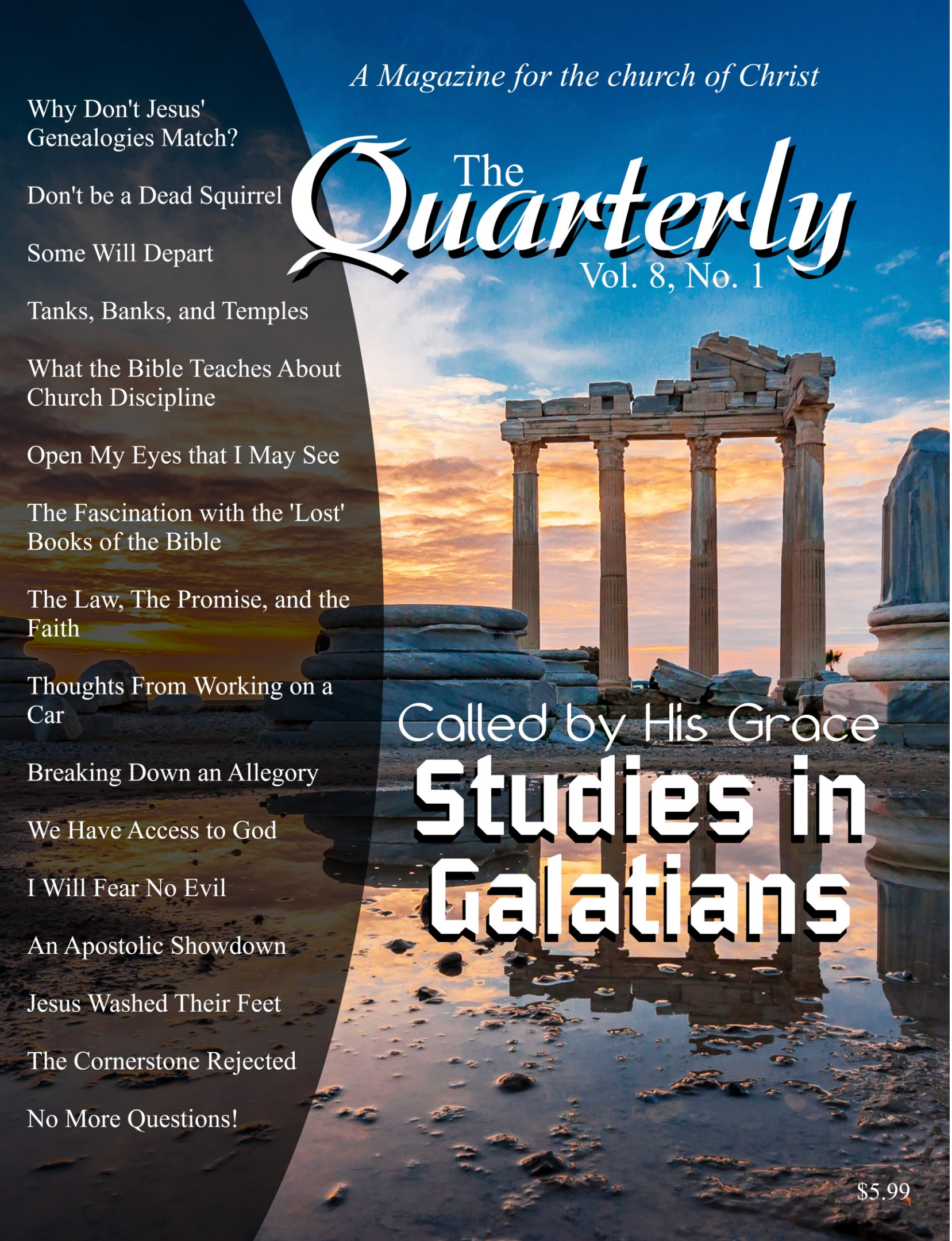

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Gantt Carter
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Raymond Elliot
Kyle Frank
Chris Gardner
Bill Howard
Roy Knight
John Krivak
Jim Mitchell
Jake Schotter
Devin Self
Matthew Shaffer
Keith Stonehart
Johnny O. Trail

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The Quarterly

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

VOL. 8 JANUARY 2024 NO. 1

BE OUR GUEST

This year is going to be great one for readers of the *Quarterly*, and part of it is because we have guest editors for the special theme in every issue in 2024! With each issue, the guest editor will pick the theme, select a handful of writers to cover it, and give them their topics to write on.

This issue, your guest editor is Gantt Carter. Gantt has written for the *Quarterly* periodically since the very first issue, back in 2017. He preaches for the 2nd & Adams church of Christ in Elk City, OK, and is also a very good friend. He chose to focus the theme on lessons in the book of Galatians. Check out his overview of this letter from Paul on page 30, and then check out the five articles afterwards that deal with different ideas found in Galatians.

Next issue, Ben Mitchell (who has contributed articles over the past year) will be the guest editor, and the theme is Creating a Heart of Worship. He's sent me the topics, and I am definitely looking forward to reading them. In July, Jake Schotter (who has been writing for us since issue 1) is taking on the guest editor role, with the topic of The Importance of Theology in the Pulpit and the Pew. And in October, Keith Stonehart (whose face was on the cover of an issue a couple years ago) will be choosing the theme.

Starting in this issue, Charles Rose will be sharing a series of articles on Church Discipline. I am certain you will be benefitted by reading this one and the ones that will appear in the next eight issues.

Gerald Cowan presents one of the best things I think I've ever read from him (and I've read stuff he's written for over 30 years), challenging Christians to say, "Open My Eyes, That I May See."

John Krivak distills some great advice on relationships, though I have to admit, when I saw the word "tanks" in the title, I expected something military. He also discusses one of the most misused parables in the Bible—the parable of the talents.

Dewayne Bryant examines the fascination people have with the so-called "lost books of the Bible." For the record, the books were never lost, and were never part of the Bible (and if you read some of them, it becomes quickly apparent why no one considered them legitimate). I personally refer to them as "Early Christian Fanfic."

You might also enjoy Barton W. Stone's look at denominationalists who give different answers than God's chosen messenger to Saul.

I could go on, but I'm out of room. Just turn the page and see what you've got to look forward to in this issue!

Bradley S. Cobb

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Editorial: No More Questions!

Bradley S. Cobb

I have everything figured out, and there's no reason for me to study anymore. After all, I agree with this well-known guy in the brotherhood, and if he said it, that settles it. And if you question it, there's only two options: you're stupid, or you're intentionally trying to change biblical doctrine!

Has anyone ever come across that way to you before?

I remember one day when I was teaching a class on 2 Peter, that I presented a section of it in a way that I thought (and still believe) was consistent with the context, showing how the same or similar wording was used elsewhere, and explained how I came to my conclusion. And then I heard the words that a decade later still ring in my ears—*That's not what Guy N. Woods said!*

This statement was not meant in a "Here's a different interpretation of that passage, what do you think of it?" or "Obviously, good brethren can disagree, but I think Woods' take is better" kind of way. Instead, it was (the tone, as well as words after class, made it abundantly clear) "Guy N. Woods said it was this, how dare you say anything else!"

Granted, some in the congregation agreed with Woods' assessment instead of mine, but they admitted that my approach made sense in the context, and they could see why I came to that conclusion. But this one man's attitude is unfortunately something that is spread across the brotherhood (and it is also an attitude prevalent in denominations)— "We have arrived at a perfect knowledge of the truth, and don't need to question anything."

I understand why some people are wary of "re-studying" an issue. This phrase (and probably better understood in some cases as a shady "tactic") has been used by several left-leaning congregations to give a veneer of spirituality and authority to their departures from the Bible. If you ever hear of a congregation whose leaders announce they are going to "re-study" the instrumental music issue, you can almost guarantee they're already planning on introducing instruments into the assembly. Same thing with "re-studying" the role of women in the assembly. If you hear these words, you can almost guarantee they will endorse women preachers pretty soon.

But unfortunately, congregations seeking to remain faithful to the Lord frequently assume they've reached a state of perfect knowledge of the important things, and don't dare question it.

And this is a problem.

Question Your Beliefs, or they aren't Really Your Beliefs

I was raised going to church—*the* church, the *one-and-only* church. Everything I believed was presented to me as *the* truth, and we were the only ones in possession of that truth. And if that is how you are raised, guess what—you will hear messages presented in a way to reinforce that perspective.

Before you think I'm badmouthing the church (I'm not), I want you to realize that almost everyone raised actively in any denomination could probably say the exact same thing as what is in that above paragraph. Because guess what—the Baptist Church isn't going to present a lesson on salvation from the Catholic view, any more than a Presbyterian is going to hear a sermon about the evils of infant baptism.

In short, we present and hear messages based on our already-agreed-upon positions on various biblical issues. We are told what the Bible teaches, and given passages that agree with our assessment. And if there are some verses that don't fit easily into that position, we either don't bring them up, or we say, "I'm not sure what that means, but it doesn't matter."

I received a phone call a few weeks ago from someone who just wanted to argue. He badmouthed the church, calling us "damnable heretics" for showing the biblical importance of baptism. When I pointed out 1 Peter 3:21 ("baptism does also now save us"), his response was telling: "Typical church of Christ, going to that passage." I reiterated what it said, and he claimed the parenthetical thought immediately afterwards showed it wasn't spiritual salvation. You know, the words, "not the removal of filth from the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God." He said that means it isn't talking about spiritual salvation. When I asked what kind of salvation he thought it meant, he said (and I'm not exaggerating or joking), "It means whoever is baptized will have a long life."

Basically, we take what members of the church

before us believed, and just accept it without critically studying it. We live off of *their* faith and *their* study, accepting their conclusions before we ever go to the Book to see for ourselves.

And we are trained to accept them as valid without asking questions, except for "What verses can I use to prove this to a Baptist I know?"

Question Your Beliefs, because that's what Jesus Taught

Read the gospel accounts, and see just how many times Jesus encouraged people to question the teachings they'd been given by the Jewish religious leaders. The Pharisees had their "traditions," teachings that had been passed on from generation to generation. They could say, with so many folks today, "That's what we've always done," or "That's what we've always taught."

But Jesus comes along and repeatedly says, "Have you not read?" and "You are mistaken, because you don't know the Scriptures."

He tosses aside their beliefs and encourages people to go back to the Book, the word of God, to find the truth.

The Catholic Church used to publicly proclaim that non-priests should not read the Bible (for direct quotes from Catholic sources, see O.C. Lambert's great book, *Catholicism Against Itself*). While they don't proclaim it as loudly anymore, Catholics I know say that is still the "hint" they get. Why? Because they know that if people read the Bible for themselves, they'll find a lot of things wrong with the Catholic Church (the pope, Mary worship, praying to dead people, etc.).

True Christians *want* people to read their Bibles.

But don't ask too many questions…

Question Your Beliefs, or You Won't Grow

I was quite egotistical as a teenager and young adult (and unfortunately, still struggle with it occasionally today). Everything seemed to come easily to me. I was a straight-A student all through elementary school (except for that one 'B' I got in second grade), Junior High, High School, and community college. I was a good song-leader, did a bit of fill-in preaching, and enjoyed getting in religious arguments. I went to a Christian college where it wasn't as easy (my grades dropped), but I was still quite certain of my rightness and had no problems telling others when someone else (even a professor) was wrong on a biblical topic.

After leaving college, I subscribed to some of the more antagonistic brotherhood papers, who had an even more extreme view than I did. I devoured them. I knew just who the false teachers were (by name), what they taught, and how they were leading people to hell.

During this whole time, I would have told you I was open-minded, willing to learn, wanting to grow in my faith. But I was only interested in things that already agreed with me and bolstered my already-held beliefs.

When I decided to go to preaching school, the teachers saw this trait in me early on, and made it their mission to humble me for my own good. They made me defend every answer, threw out objection after objection (some of which I'd never heard before), and forced me to realize *I don't know everything*, and that I had been living largely off of what I had been taught, without bothering to create my own faith.

I also found that some of the teachers disagreed on some issues. But we were told at the very beginning, "We are not here to tell you *what* to believe, but we are here to teach you how to study the Bible so you can figure out the truth." We focused heavily on context, context, context.

You might expect me to say, "And then I discovered what I'd always believed or was taught was wrong!" And that's true on some parts, but what it did more than anything was help me see *for myself* that much of what I'd always heard *was true*. And when that happened, I grew.

Question Your Beliefs Like Our Predecessors Did

Anyone who knows me very well knows I'm big into history—especially Restoration Movement history. Each of the big names in the early Restoration Movement were brave souls who were willing to question what they had been taught, and looked for answers in the word of God. They weren't taught the truth by a "church of Christ preacher," they were taught the truth by Jesus and His apostles in the Book. Different men from different denominations were honest enough to look at their beliefs and compare them with the Bible—and changed when they found the Bible didn't agree with them.

Abner Jones and Elias Smith were Baptists. Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone were Presbyterians. James O'Kelly was a Methodist.

They changed their beliefs on church leadership, the existence of "clergy," on the frequency of the Lord's Supper, the importance of baptism in the plan of salvation, the mode of baptism, and several other doctrines of denominational importance.

These men didn't always agree with each other on everything. And when that happened, they had discussions, presented their sides, discussed the perceived problems with each other's sides, and when they might not come to a complete agreement on the topics, they never shied away from asking questions *as brethren*, and being willing to accept the possibility that they could still learn (most of them, at least).

If the Restoration Movement leaders were transported to our modern times, with their same beliefs that they had then, many congregations would disfellowship them. Campbell was a post-millennialist (not pre-millennialist like so many falsely claim). Elias Smith struggled with Universalism. Campbell was opposed to colleges to train preachers. Robert Richardson believed there were true Christians in most the denominations. Abner Jones fellowshipped congregations that used instruments.

When I've brought this up before, I've been told, "They were finding their way out of the dark, but now we have the complete light." In other words, they had growing to do, but not us!

What's the Point?

When we have this "we know it all" or "we have arrived" attitude, we (whether we realize it or not) stifle questions, stifle spiritual growth, and cause people to leave the church—or at least leave our congregation.

If someone honestly has questions or doesn't understand why we do some of the things we do or why certain things are wrong, we should *invite* those questions. And if they have trouble harmonizing our answers with other Scripture, we should brotherly discuss those things.

And if someone comes to different conclusions on more "touchy" subjects (the order of events at the coming of Christ—aka eschatology; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the date of Revelation; marriage, divorce, and remarriage and all the various nuances involved in that discussion; etc.), then we should show patience, forbearance, and love—and realize that just as the apostles needed to grow and learn better (see Peter in Galatians 2), just as Jesus needed to grow in wisdom (Luke 2:52), we too need to grow—which means there are certainly things we don't understand properly in the Bible.

When the final judgment is described, it is based on (1) knowing God, (2) obeying the gospel, and (3) our works. Notice that it does not say it is based on our eschatological understandings, our theological comprehension of the atonement, or any such thing. It is based on knowing and believing in God and His Christ, obeying the gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, enacted when we willingly submit to baptism into Christ), and doing good works.

I've seen good brethren ostracized, written up and written off, and effectively kicked out of the church for coming to a different conclusion than Guy N. Woods, or whoever the favorite preacher/writer happens to be.

And there is no excuse for this.

I don't agree with every article that has appeared in the *Quarterly* (every person who's ever written for it). But each article is presented by someone who loves God, has obeyed the gospel, and is striving to live for the Lord.[1]

I encourage you to ask questions. And I encourage you, leaders, to encourage people to ask questions. That is how they grow. And if it is a difficult topic, you get the opportunity to study more, which helps *you* grow.

I also encourage you to realize sometimes good brethren can differ on their understanding of many topics, but still be brethren—because it doesn't affect the answer to "What must I do to be saved," or "What must I do to walk in the light?"

If you have any questions, and need a place to ask them, feel free to send them our way and I or another of our regular writers will attempt to help you understand the answer and *how* we came to that conclusion.

Editor@CobbPublishing.com

[1] Note: this is at least what I am led to believe when the articles are submitted.

House to House
Heart to Heart

A special issue for inactive members of churches of Christ

Fallen away. Inactive since Covid. Moved and never found a new congregation.

Our communities are full of once-faithful brothers and sisters. We miss them. We love them. Let's work together to win them back. For the first time, House to House has an issue to reach former members. Contact us before April 4 to send the issue: An Invitation to Come Home. Call us toll-free at 1-877-338-3397 or email matt@housetohouse.com.

Bill Howard

I will fear no evil.

Reflect on this. Can I truly, and with conviction, embrace the truth of this statement? Can I claim it, stand by it without wavering? From newly added children into the Kingdom of our Lord, to the long-time believer in God: we MUST deal with this state of mind. Beyond being a state of mind, it is a tenet, a declaration of our faith in God. "Why?" we might ask. The answer: it affirms our belief in the one and only God. The God of creation, The God of the Universe, The Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. The Sovereign God, the Creator. In Him is the source of everything that is good, the Fountain of every blessing that is known to mankind. The God who gave us a means of living forever in his presence by the sacrifice of His Son.

When we accept the necessity of believing God, if our life is going to have any lasting value, then, we can boldly, without equivocation, affirm I will fear no evil. What is Evil? The simple answer is anything that is not of God. The extended answer runs into hundreds of moral and physical misdeeds. Stumbling blocks which cause us to fail to live righteously and beckon us to participate in many other wrongs which Satan lays in our pathway. It is his wish to take us away from God and immerse within us the attitude of defiance. This separates us from our Heavenly Father. Satan is our adversary, our enemy (1 Peter 5:8). Nothing makes him happier than to see one of God's family leave the faith. He is always against truth; he is always against goodness, and he is always against God and His family. He is a stalker "seeking whom he may devour." He is doubly dangerous because of his ability to beguile the unsuspecting. He can seem to be what he isn't; he is a hypocrite. "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). If that alone was not treacherous enough, let Paul continue: "So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve" (2 Corinthians 11:15, NLT).

We can be fully aware of the magnitude of dangers that surround us and yet still seek constantly to embroil our lives in sin and evil. For what purpose? Satan and his servants, his ministers exist for the sole purpose of continuing the war against God, and they are relentless. Enticing one of God's family into sin is a victory they celebrate. So, what is the answer to this peril?

David had the answer thousands of years before we were aware of evil and temptation. He knew there was only one source of protection which could sustain him. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, and because he believed this and had faith in the power of the Lord, he could say, "I WILL FEAR NO EVIL."

We have already established that evil is that which is opposed to God. When God had completed the creation, Genesis 1:31 tells us: "Then God looked over all He had made, and He saw it was very good." Which part of creation was good and which part was bad? God said every particle of His creation was very good. All means one hundred percent; one hundred percent of anything is all of it. We can safely deduce then that God did not create evil. If ALL is good, then no evil existed at that time. Man likes to lay claim to having created something, swell out his chest, pat himself on the back and take pride in his creation. The writer has said many times in

books, sermons and writings that man has never created anything except evil. Man's claims of creation are nothing more than using and assembling that which God had created. The Conclusion: If God did not create evil then it came from created man.

God created mankind with a will, the right to determine, the right to make choices. An excellent example of this is found in the second and third chapter of Genesis. God's creation, man, had been instructed by God and told to eat the fruit from all the trees in the garden except one, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eat that fruit, and you will surely die. Instructions were clear and the warning was unmistakable. God clearly warned of the consequence for disobedience, but He didn't keep them from eating that which was forbidden. Their will was exercised; they made the choice to disobey. They chose to do what God had told them they shouldn't do. Adam and Eve didn't die on the spot, but they were no longer immortal. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin…" (Romans 5:12a). Because evil desires were stronger than the desire to obey God, death came to mankind. Evil reared its ugly head, and the world was changed forever.

God's plan for man did not include sin and evil and death. He knew that it would come into being, but it was not His desire. God's intention for man is reflected in the story of the Garden of Eden. All was good, everything was perfect, every need supplied. There would be no suffering, no unhappiness, no tears, and no death. He did not wish for hatred, division, immorality, etc., but it was man's choice to bring this into the world. Because God had given man a will, he had the privilege of choosing. The world was, and is, in chaos and will be so until God decides to bring it to an end. The world will end. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). If this is true, and it is, the Lord said so, what is going to happen then? Good question: and when we do question, we will comprehend what God, through His word, has wanted mankind to know since the beginning of time. Since the time of the patriarchs of old, the inspired prophets, the Lord Himself, and His apostles speaking by the direction of the Holy Spirit, this has been their story. End time will come when God is ready. When the Lord is ready, we must also be ready. There is a Savior that wishes for all to be saved and dwell with the Lord in Heaven (2 Peter 3:9). The world as we see it will be gone. If that is true, and it is, God says so, where does that leave mankind? It leaves everyone who has ever lived entering the final phase of life where we will live forever in eternity. We can only enjoy this if we make the right choices, but we do have to choose between good and evil. We must choose our eternity, or the choice will be made for us.

When David affirmed his absolute faith in God, what was this faith telling him? I WILL LIVE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER. He knew the Lord was his shepherd, and he feared no evil. Sin and evil no longer held him in their grasp. He was freed from sin and placed his trust in God and feared no evil.

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus did that. The angel told Joseph: "And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). From Romans: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Paul told the Ephesians: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Jesus gave his life joyfully that we may have redemption from our sins, even the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14). In Hebrews 12:2 we read: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Knowing the cruel treatment He was to endure, the brutal death by crucifixion, Jesus was joyful. Why? He was obedient to His Fathers will. He was giving his life that sinful man can be cleansed from sin, and He knew when he had finished His task, He would once again be in heaven with His Father.

Though He faced suffering and death, Jesus was joyful. Why? He was going to go back and be with God forever. David was joyful; he was going to live in the house of the Lord forever. What is the joy of the child of God? Knowing we are doing as our Lord has requested and expects of us. Jesus said:

> *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; Even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love.*

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment. That ye love one another, as I have loved you."

John 15:11-12.

The only true and lasting joy is not found in the 'things' of the world; it is found only in our relationship with God. Paul told the Romans: "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Shortly before His crucifixion Jesus said: "heretofore have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). Also, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). To the Christian there is no promise of a trouble-free life, but whatever we face in life will all be history when we meet our Savior. Through His life and death, He has overcome everything that is of the world: sin, evil, Satan and that which can separate us from God. He is the winner over all and wishes for each of us the same. "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (3 John 11). To have the assurance of fearing nothing, here is the key that opens the door to that place Jesus has gone to prepare: Grace, Love, Mercy. Because of God's love He has given us what we do not deserve. "But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21). "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit: which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6). "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24-25).

Only when our faith in God is absolute, when we dedicate ourselves to serving Him, can we joyously say we fear no evil. As His children, we have no reason to fear. For the most part the world around us has fallen deeply into immorality. We have no fear of that; we have God who has promised us protection (1 Corinthians 10:13). The faithful Christian has no fear of death because it is only a separation from physical being to a Spiritual being assured of eternal life with Him (Jude 21). We do not worry about anything; worry is an evil, and we should have no part in it. God will supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19). God's family enjoys the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance that fills our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). His family avoids the works of the flesh because those who indulge will not be in Heaven for eternity (Galatians 5:19-21). We know that if we are faithful until death, He will give us a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). Knowing these facts are all correct because they are from His Holy Word, we will do well to ponder one thought: What will Jesus' verdict be when I stand before Him to be judged? God gave us the power to determine our future. What will we choose?

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Isaiah 41:10

"For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not: I will help thee."

Isaiah 41:13

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Don't be a Dead Squirrel

Roy Knight

I know this might not be a pretty picture, but driving down the road I have seen plenty of dead squirrels. Do you know why there are dead squirrels on the road? You will probably say, "Well, it's quite obvious. They were run over by a car or truck." After all, a half-pound mammal is no match for a 2,000-pound car. And I would agree with that, in part. But I believe there is a deeper reason for why we see so many dead squirrels. I think it's because they do not have the ability to make a decisive decision. Have you ever seen a squirrel with a car bearing down on it, maybe even your car, and the squirrel will run to one side of the road and then another and then back again? Even when we are trying to miss the squirrel, he ends up darting back out into the road. If he had just stuck with his first decision, he would have been safe and half way up a tree.

Do you know why there are so many spiritually dead Christians today? No, it's not because they were run over by a car, it's because they are indecisive in their decision-making. Many Christians have one foot in the world and one foot in the church. They live so close to the world that they enjoy the "passing pleasures of sin," yet stay close enough to the church to have their name on the roll. And all the while the devil is bearing down on them, hoping to run them over.

Do you know why there are so many spiritually dead Christians today?

Such indecisiveness is found throughout the Bible. One that comes to my mind is the contest between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. I Kings 18:20-21 reads, "So [king] Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. And Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word." Elijah told them to choose between God and Baal, and the people just stood there with their mouths open, going back and forth in their minds thinking, "What should we do? What should we do?" You see, that is squirrel mentality.

Remember the prophets of Baal set up their altar and Elijah set up his. The prophets of Baal went first and cried out for Baal to send down fire and burn up their sacrifice. They did this all morning and nothing happened. When it was Elijah's turn, he poured water all over his altar three times and called on the Lord. God then sent fire from heaven and burnt up the sacrifice, the stones of the altar, and all the water that filled the trench. After that, the people cried out, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (If you want to read the whole story it is found in 1 Kings 18:20-39.)

Someone might say, "Well, if God would do a miracle like that, I would believe." And the answer is, "He did." That miracle is the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus from the grave. Paul speaks of the witnesses of this fact in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8: "He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me…" Yet, people still stand there wondering what to do: whether to cast their lot with Jesus or go back out into the world. Really? The answer to me should be obvious: Choose Jesus.

We have ACCESS to GOD

A Study of Hebrews 10:19-31

Jake Schotter

Hebrews contains several warnings, encouragements, and feedback on how to remain moving forward as Christians instead of retreating. The primary focus of the book is to explain how Jesus Christ and the New Covenant are "better" than the former things they have been under as Jewish believers. The believers are expected to endure (10:36) and exercise confidence in Jesus Christ (4:14, 16; 10:22-23).

One of the most vivid examples of this is found in 10:19-31. In this text, we will observe and elaborate on the believer's reality and response. "After considering the 'once for all time' aspect of the gospel in Hebrews 10:1-18, the writer turns his attention to another implication of the gospel," Al Mohler wrote. "He is once again going to summarize its various aspects in order to help his readers remember the glorious realities Jesus' work accomplishes for his people. Additionally, he will exhort his people to action on the basis of these glorious realities."[2]

The Believer's Reality (10:19-21)

The rich reality all believers experience and should be encouraged by is the reality of having access to God. Although this was originally a shadow or foretaste of what was to come, they knew they had their sins cleansed. "The bulk of the letter is devoted to providing the motivation: by sacrificing

[2] Mohler, R. Albert. **Exalting Jesus in Hebrews.** *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary.* David Platt, ed., et. al. B&H Publishing Group, 2017: 154.

himself once and for all, Jesus has provided cleansing from sin and broken down the barrier that separates humans from God."[3]

As New Testament Christians, we have a distinct privilege that Old Testament saints were prohibited from experiencing, except by proxy. Their sins were removed from them but not forgotten. The New Covenant's promise of forgetting sins was something to look forward to! The author of Hebrews focuses on the promise of Jeremiah 31:34 and again in Hebrews 8:12 when he wrote, "'For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.'" This contrasts with the former "sins were remembered" with the new reality being "sins are removed."

What made the difference? It was the blood of Christ! This is elaborated at the beginning of Hebrews 10: "For the Law, since it has *only a shadow* of the good things *to come* and not the *very form* of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they *offer continually* year by year, make *perfect* those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having *once been cleansed*, would no longer have *consciousness* of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a *reminder of sins year by year*. For it is *impossible* for the *blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*" (vv. 1-4, emphasis added). Verse 10 declares, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all."

Since Jesus Christ is our high priest, there is another change that the Christian needs to be aware of: our access to God. Under the Old Covenant, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. We can imagine a sign posted that said: "Authorized Persons Only." Access to this holy place was restricted until Jesus made a new and living way by His flesh. But now, we are able to "have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19)!

However, we must prepare ourselves before we approach God. We cannot enter flippantly or with impure carelessness. The priests in the Old Testament had to wash themselves before entering the Holy Place to do the sacrifices (Exodus 30:18-21). We are to come to God with a pure heart and a clean conscience. We "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" because "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 1:5).

All believers are to take hold and grasp firmly what is theirs in Christ, because we are expected to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (10:23). They are not to forsake this "new and living way" (10:20) for the former was fulfilled. The author had already described this to them: "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things" (10:1). It is like a picture of a delicious meal in a cookbook, making you hungry and ready for what is to come… namely, the meal. Why would we ever want to go back to the recipe (the potential) for the meal (the fulfillment)? Besides, the Old Law was full of ordinances, and under the New Covenant we are able to enjoy life more fully in Christ because of who He is and what He has done!

Therefore, throughout Hebrews, we have warning passages that address believers thinking about forsaking what they have in Christ for something less. Thomas Schreiner summarized the purpose as:

> In other words, the warnings should be read synoptically. They mutually cast light on one another. Hence the purpose of the letter becomes clear, for the warnings urge readers not to fall away. They must not turn away from Jesus and the new covenant and revert to the Mosaic law and the old covenant. The same message could be formulated positively. The readers are called on to persevere, to hold on, and to keep believing until the end. If they fall away, the author insists, they will face destruction and damnation.[4]

You are in trouble whether you are drifting (2:1-4) or doubting the Word (3:7-4:13), experiencing dullness toward the Word (5:11-6:20), or despising (10:26-39) or defying the Word (12:14-29). The author of this treatise wants them to remember what they have in Christ if they are willingly walking

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[3] Grindheim, Sigurd. **The Letter to the Hebrews.** *Pillar New Testament Commentary*. D.A. Carson, ed. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023: 29.

[4] Schreiner, Thomas R. **Hebrews.** *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary.* T. Desmond Alexander, ed., et. al. Lexham Press, 2020: 14.

away into sin and despising the Word of God. We need to reorient our eyes and adjust our focus on the amazing privilege of being able to be in God's presence.

The Believer's Response (10:22-31)

A BELIEVER DRAWS NEAR (10:22)

The believer has been invited "to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus" (10:19). Prior passages show this would include "the throne of grace" where God is (4:16; 7:25). This is a new privilege believers have because of the New Covenant. We are able to enter ourselves "with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" because we have been saved. The nature of our salvation is no longer dependent on future expectations of a future death that will be sufficient for all time (10:3). We are able to have "full assurance" because "by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (10:14). Therefore, we are able to firmly hold to Christ's priesthood and the superiority of the New Covenant.

This exhortation to draw near to God is frequently repeated:

- "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).
- "that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27).
- "for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).
- "in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Ephesians 3:12).
- "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).
- "Yahweh is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).
- "But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have set Lord Yahweh as my refuge, that I may recount all Your works" (Psalm 73:28).
- "Yahweh is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 145:18).

We are also able to draw near by being saved by Jesus Christ and sanctified through the work of the Holy Spirit. After all, one cannot enter the presence of God without receiving His holiness. David asked, "Who may ascend into the mountain of Yahweh? And who may rise in His holy place?" He answered, "He who has innocent hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to worthlessness and has not sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4). Countless examples could be given of so-called believers who did not draw near in sincerity but the nation of Judah (Jeremiah 3:10; 24:7) and Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:21-22) illustrate the point. Being sincere was Paul's advice to slaves (Ephesians 6:5) and God's requirement from very early on in the Law (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Cleansing is necessary to be in the presence of God. The priests needed to wash themselves "so that they will not die" (Exodus 30:20-21; cf. Exodus 29:4; 40:12; Leviticus 8:6; 11:40; 14:8-9; 15:5-6; 16:4, 24, 26; 17:15; 22:6; Numbers 19:7-8; Deuteronomy 23:12). However, no matter how many times a person physically washes themselves, if there is not an inner cleansing of the heart by God, then we remain with an "evil conscience." Hebrews 9:14 adds, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" A believer who desires to draw near to God is living out the internal and external cleansing of their mind, heart, and conscience. This is inextricably evidence of salvation (Ezekiel 36:25-26; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2; 3:21).

The believer's cleansing is a cause for confidence! "He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25a). A believer has confidence in their salvation and even further forgiveness of sins because "He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25b). This is also mentioned in 1 John 1:7 where the Apostle John emphasizes that the "blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

A BELIEVER HOLDS FAST (10:23)

We have been saved and sanctified by God. His work draws us to Him and we desire to love and follow Him. We recognize our position is because of Jesus Christ's person and work. He is our access

to God. Therefore, we are able to have hope! A person who puts their faith in God is a person who continually confesses Christ. A person whose focus is put on Christ will always hope. A person who has hope will keep on keeping on. This becomes our reason for living and believing. The person who is truly converted will hold fast (persevere) until the very end (Revelation 2:10).

The "confession of our hope" must be Jesus Christ. According to 1 Timothy 3:16, "And by common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

The Scriptures are clear we need to be vigilant to keep on keeping on and persevere:

- "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).
- "It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).
- "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Galatians 6:9).
- "but examine all things; hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
- "You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest you, having been carried away by the error of unprincipled men, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).
- "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you" (Revelation 3:3).

We need to hold fast morally, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally because Satan is determined to deceive, discourage, devour, devastate, defeat, depress, and destroy us. We must hold fast. "Hope is the essential element in faith (11:1). One cannot have real faith without believing that God is a 'rewarder' of those 'who seek Him' (11:6). Christ is the focal point of our hope (6:19, 20). In Him we have true hope in which we can rejoice (3:6)… Hope is an 'anchor' for the soul (6:11, 12, 18-20)."[5] When Christians focus on God, we know that He "is faithful." God is the reason for our perseverance.

A BELIEVER CONSIDERS OTHERS (10:24-25)

We must remember this passage is not primarily and principally about church attendance. To make it simply about our plea for fellow believers to attend worship services, Bible studies, and fellowship gatherings is missing the point of the passage. To be clear, this is an obvious application of the passage, but it is not the main point. The focus is on having access to God and how that leads a believer to persevere in the faith (7:1-10:22).

Believers are expected to "consider" others. This word carries with it the idea of intentionality where the mind is intently focused on "stimulating one another to love and good deeds." Believers are concerned about one another because they care for one another! "Stimulate" is all about inciting or provoking people (used positively; cf. Deuteronomy 29:28; Acts 15:39) to act in a reciprocal manner towards fellow believers. As individuals, we have access to God. That point has been established throughout this article. Yet, we want this to be a community activity where we are all persevering in the faith and we enter together into the presence of God.

Sigurd Grindheim insightfully wrote, "He [the author] issues an encouragement to show love, but formally it is an exhortation to be perceptive about fellow church members. Grammatically, the object of the verb is not the act of love as such but 'one another.' The verb that is rendered 'be perceptive' (katanoeo) is usually translated 'consider carefully' (3:1; cf. Matt 7:3; Luke 12:24, 27), and the point here is to be careful and perceptive in one's interaction with fellow believers."[6] The result, then, is the mutual edification that takes place when we are considerate of each other. We know and find ways to love each other and we find ways to do "good deeds" for one another. This combination of "love"

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[5] Pace, Martel. **Hebrews.** *Truth for Today Commentary: An Exegesis & Application of the Holy Scriptures.* Eddie Cloer, ed. Resource Publications, 2007: 396.

[6] Grindheim, 507.

and "good works" has been described in 6:10 and will be further elaborated for the majority of chapter 13 (vv. 1-19).

"Essential to such incitement to love and good works is the fact that we do not keep abandoning the assembly of our own selves."[7] The focus of having access to God is that we do so together! Of course, this section, which helps encourage the habit of attending instead of forsaking the assembly is summarized in one word: presence. We "draw near" because we are saved (10:22). "Let us consider how" requires forethought and intentionality (v. 24). You are present, not absent, when you are "not forsaking *our* own assembling *together*" (v. 25, emphasis added). A person's presence prepares the way for personal relationships that promote love and good works. This is how we are encouraged and stimulated to be more and do more in the Kingdom.

Ultimately, being able to have access into the presence of God is the believer's hope. Eternal life involves having a personal relationship with God and receiving what He has promised to believers before the beginning of the world (John 17:3; Titus 1:2; 3:7; 1 John 3:2-3). Eternal life is the most anticipated culmination of believers' salvation. It is the impetus for us to do exactly what the Hebrew author encourages us to do as we "see the day drawing near." This is most likely the eschatological expectation of Christ's second coming, judgment, and eternity being ushered in (Matthew 13:22). It is interesting to see Christ's question in Luke 18, "Now, will God not bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 'I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly'" (vv. 7-8).

When we come together in worship, the emphasis is not on what we can get but on what we can give. When we willingly and regularly forsake the assembly, we are letting others down as sources of discouragement. We are commanded in Scripture to follow through:

- "may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people" (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
- "Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:18-19).
- "in all things show yourself to be a model of good works, with purity in doctrine, dignified" (Titus 2:7).
- "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a love of the brothers without hypocrisy, fervently love one another from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

The spirit of Christ is all about considering others: giving a helping hand, offering encouragement, lending our strength, lifting a load, bearing a burden, building a friendship, and loving as He loved. Let us consider one another to be merciful in our dealings, to be just in our judgments, to be loving in our disposition, to be holy in our character, to be fair in our thinking, to be honest in our relationships, and to be righteous in our ways.

A BELIEVER IS FEARFUL (10:26-31)

This final section is typical of ancient rhetoric. Ben Witherington noted, "In any sort of rhetorical discourse the appeal to the deeper emotions of love and fear and anger and grief and the like was supposed to be made near the end… to reinforce the points made and to insure that the audience will hear and heard the message urged upon them."[8] A believer who has access to God has a high privilege but is also expected to highly regard this privilege.

Several rhetorical questions undergird this section. If a believer has been freed from sin, then why return to sin (v. 26)? If a believer has been spared from judgment, why desire to experience judgment again (v. 27)? If a believer has God for him, why would he want God against him (vv. 28-30)? Of course, the answer to these questions is "absolutely not!" Why? "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (v. 31). If you have access to God, you have been saved, rescued, freed, and spared from Him! This very passage illustrates to

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[7] Lenski, R.C.H. **The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James.** Augsburg Publishing House, 1966: 353. Sigurd Grindheim emphasized this, as well, by writing, "Commitment to the congregation is an expression of care for fellow believers" (p. 508).

[8] Witherington III, Ben. **Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude.** IVP Academic, 2007: 282.

us: "Behold then the kindness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22a).

The key to avoiding the "severity of God," here, is to be faithful. We "draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (v. 22). As such, we need to grasp the seriousness of beholding God and being in His presence. The effect becomes evident when we focus on God and let Him transform us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). This thought continues into 2 Corinthians 4: "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The preacher of this sermon, which we refer to as Hebrews, uses an excellent strategy every minister needs to be aware of: you need to utilize both warnings and comfort. Those who are in danger are warned and those who are faithful are comforted. If you are faithful to draw near to God and fellow believers, then keep at it! Your faith is persevering and will be rewarded by God (11:6). However, if you are rejecting the things beneficial for your spiritual health, you are in danger of disproving your faith and ultimately your salvation. "The things of God can't be belittled without horrific consequences. The author lovingly warns the readers about the judgment to come, urging them to avoid it by staying true to their confession."[9]

CONCLUSION

Believers have access to God and we can have confidence to draw near to Him and to encourage our fellow brethren, as well! The Hebrew author describes to us these wonderful realities but also how they involve important responsibilities. To depreciate any of this would have grave consequences and be indicative of a potential apostasy from the faith.

WRITING GUIDELINES for the Quarterly

We are accepting submissions for upcoming issues of the *Quarterly*.

1. Must discuss God/Christ, the Bible, Christian living, the church, or something related to it (if you have any questions, contact us).

2. Between 750 and 6,000 words.

3. Unless the person has published positions (in print or in article form online) that can be easily verified, any articles "exposing" someone should be confined to "exposing" the doctrine, and not mentioning names.

4. Articles on "controversial" topics are welcome, though we may delay including them in order to get an article from the other side.

Send articles or questions to Editor@CobbPublishing.com

[9] Schreiner, 329.

Open My Eyes that I May See

Gerald Cowan –

Reading: Ephesians 1:2-7,2:4-10,4:1-7 and 4:11-16; Titus 2:11-15

Introduction:

God has a long-standing complaint against His people, expressed often in scripture. Isaiah mentions it (Isaiah 6:9-10). So do Jeremiah (Jeremiah 5:20-22) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 12:20). Then Jesus repeats it in Matthew 13:13-16 and John 12:40. Paul referred to it in Acts 28:26-27 AND Romans 11:8. Here it is: They have eyes but will not see, ears but will not hear, and hearts that neither understand nor seek the will of God. The need to "see with your heart" (understand and seek God's will from the heart) is the point I want to emphasize (compare Romans 6:17, "Obey from the heart"). Note how Jesus quotes Isaiah: "They blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their hearts" (John 12:40)—just like Pharaoh. Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians that they might have the eyes of the heart/mind enlightened (Ephesians 1:18).

To put the idea into proper focus: we need awareness – eyes that can see and ears that hear the truth, minds that perceive, understand, and acknowledge the conditions that actually exist. We need a vision of the potential goodness, the condition that could and should exist. We need more, a willingness to be involved in ways that can and perhaps will change things for the better, actuate the potential good. We need hearts that accept the needs of the world as somehow "our business." Rather than be content with lesser things, the *status quo,* not seeking more for ourselves and unheeding about the condition and needs of others. Why feel any obligation to others as long as you feel life is good for you?

APPLICATION: Is It Any of Our Business?

The man was old, and shabbily dressed – one of the homeless. He looked tired. Defeat was written in his face and in the slump of his shoulders. He was ashamed to beg, but he had to. And so he swallowed his pride and asked every stranger who passed by, "Can you spare anything for me?" He saw the little boy tug at his father's sleeve as they approached him, and heard the boy say, "Daddy, can we help the poor old man? Let's help him daddy, please!" Hope flickered for a moment, but the father gripped the boy's hand and pulled him quickly past. "Come on," he said impatiently. "He's none of our business." Neither of them saw the tears that sprang to the old man's eyes. The child may not have understood his father's attitude, but he seemed to accept it, and seemed to forget it. But that night the father heard a strange prayer from his little boy. After his usual bedtime prayer the boy added, "And please God, help that old man we saw on the street today – unless he isn't any of your business either."

How about you? How about us? Are the poor and needy any of our business? If a neighbor's child goes to school hungry and poorly dressed, because his parents are too proud to ask for help, is that any of our business? Jesus said (in Mark 14:7) *"You will always have the poor with you, and whenever you*

want to you can do them good." (Notice that one's will and desire to do good are involved).

A man commits suicide, because life has become a burden he can no longer bear, and not one person in all the world seems to care whether he lives or dies. Is that any of our business? (Galatians 6:1-2, 1 Peter 1:22). A man who wants to know God and obey him for salvation accepts a false doctrine because an apparently sincere person misled him. Is that our business? (Acts 18:26).

A missionary has lost his support, and must leave his work and return home. But that is none of our business is it? (Philippians.4:13-17). The church in Philippi made Paul's mission their business. Are there none to support today's missions? There are many good works the church is not able do, some works that have to be dropped from time to time because people refuse to give more of themselves and do more themselves. Is that any of our business as contributing and fellowshipping members? (2 Corinthians 8:5, 12-15).

Just What is Our Business Anyway? The Church has a Threefold Mission that Involves the Eyes and the Heart (the Eyes of the Heart).

First, there is a mission to the minds of unbelievers *"Open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God "* (Acts 26:18). We must see their true condition: lost and hopeless without Christ (Ephesians 2:12). We must acknowledge the possibility of their salvation if and when they respond obediently to Christ and the gospel (Romans 1:16, 10:12-17). We must care enough to share the Lord and His truth (2 Corinthians 5:14). It is easy to condemn the heathen – easy to pray that they might come to know the truth. But our mission is not just to pray for them. Our mission is to take the truth to them, make the truth available to them (Mark 16:15-16).

We also have a mission to the needs (material, mental, and moral as well as spiritual needs) of the community and the church. We must recognize the needs. How could the love of God dwell in one who sees his brother's need but shuts up his heart of compassion from him (1 John 3:17). Pure and undefiled religion is to visit and help widows and orphans (and any others) in their afflictions while keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27), not just praying for God to help them, but actually doing whatever they can to help (James 2:15-17). We must acknowledge our ability and opportunity (which adds up to responsibility) to help meet the needs. We can do something about it if we are willing (Galatians 6:10, 2 Corinthians 8:14). Then we must care enough to do the helpful needful thing (1 John 3:17-19, "Love....in deed and in truth. In this way we will assure our hearts before the Lord").

We have a definitive mission to the church itself, both individually and collectively, both locally and universally (2 Corinthians 11:28). Provide edification, exhortation, and example (Ephesians 4:15-16, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Corinthians 10:30-31, 1 Timothy 4:12). Promote unity among all true believers (Ephesians 4:3). The church, the body of Christ, is designed to include all its members, and all congregations of members (Acts 2:47, Ephesians 4:4). No individual member and no single congregation comprise the church (Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:13ff). Each Christian and each congregation must consider all other Christians and all other congregations of the church. We are not free to dictate to others, nor to isolate ourselves from others.

Note: congregational anarchy, sometimes passed off as congregational autonomy – is no less wrong than individual anarchy (Romans 14:7). Autonomy is commonly considered as authority to exist separately, responsible only for and to ourselves as congregations of same-minded persons. But the same word could be applied to individual – it actually implies self-rule, a law unto oneself, whether individual or group. But that is impossible. Imagine the confusion if everyone just did whatever seemed right in his own eyes (as in the days of the Judges (Judges 21-25), or takings sides with one or another possible leader (Paul, Apollos, Peter or Christ, perhaps others – Corinthians 1:0-13). Who was crucified for you? into whom were you baptized? Each Christian and each congregation is responsible for maintaining acceptability to God and is under law to God in Christ as Paul was (1 Corinthians 9:21) so that the body/church does not have to reject any of its parts (Galatians 6:1-10).

Let Us Pray that We may Become Unselfish Lovers of Others, and Unselfish Doers of Good for Others in the Lord's Name.

(Pray this with me, if you can). Our Father God. We do not always know how to pray as we should. Our prayers are too often selfish, always asking for

things, asking You to do something for us. And what we receive we often take for granted, as if somehow we deserved it. In the midst of plenty it is hard for us to be properly appreciative and grateful, and too often we forget. Our senses are dull. There is more beauty in the world than we ever see. Much that is truly beautiful is not noticed because we do not recognize its beauty. We don't know what to look for. There is ugliness too, in this world. There is sickness and pain, and dying – and the continual threat of hostility and war. Much of this goes unnoticed too. We have not really wanted to see it – perhaps because we haven't been willing to correct it, or be involved in it. We live in a time that must be terribly distressing to You, our God. It is a time when rebellion, ingratitude and intolerance are the most prominent attributes of society. Our foundations are being shaken; our defenses are crumbling. Our souls are being tried and we are afraid – afraid because we find that our souls are too often tied to nothing greater than ourselves, our own desires and ambitions, our petty struggles to acquire more things for ourselves, even at the expense of others. We dare not ask for more blessings. We ask instead that You open our eyes. Give us eyes that can see You, our God. Eyes that are able to see both beauty and ugliness, and human need. We ask for minds that can understand, and hearts that will not back away from the challenge, but will love and help, which will prove to all that You do live in us, and that through us You are able to touch the lives of others. When we understand that these things are blessings too, then we will be blessed indeed. And the world will be glad that we live in it. So will we. And we believe You will be too. We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Conclusion:

The way to improvement in anything begins with desire – the desire to be better. I do not know anyone who ever became a better person against his will and desire. Neither do you. It does not happen that way. No one ever becomes a Christian against his will either. Those who have eyes to see the truth and hearts to desire it will surely come closer to God in some way, in whatever way is right and needful.

There is a familiar song by Washington Gladden to the tune Maryton 8,8,8,8 with these beginning words.

O Master, let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me Thy secret, help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

I am offering new words that fit the same tune precisely. I hope you can sing it, and pray it, with me.

OPEN MY LIFE, OPEN MY HEART, OPEN MY LIFE

Open my eyes Lord. Let me see
People in need where e're they be;
Enlighten me and fill my mind
That I may be eyes to the blind.

Open my ears to all Thy truth
And to the souls who cry to Thee,
And may their cries so touch my hear
That I to them will grace impart.

Open my heart to share Thy grace
With all the world so loved by Thee
And from my heart lift up my voice
With all who weep, all who rejoice.

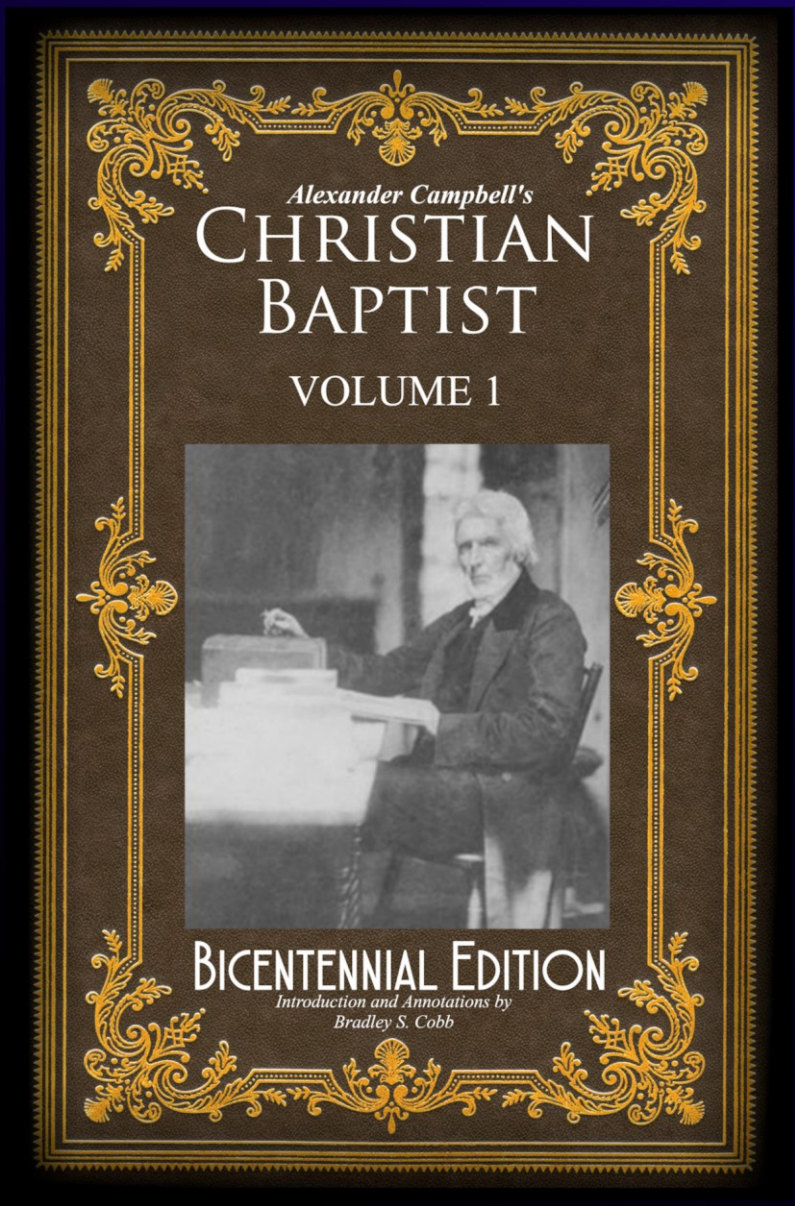
Open my hands and let me work
That I may give to those in need,
Shelter and food so let me share
That none can doubt how much I care.

Hands to the helpless I would be,
Until the world from want is free.
Feet to the crippled, week and lame,
I lift them up in Jesus' name.

Open my eyes, my ears, my mouth,
Open my hands, open my heart;
Open my life that all may see
The blessed Christ Who lives in me.

Gerald Cowan

200 years in the making!



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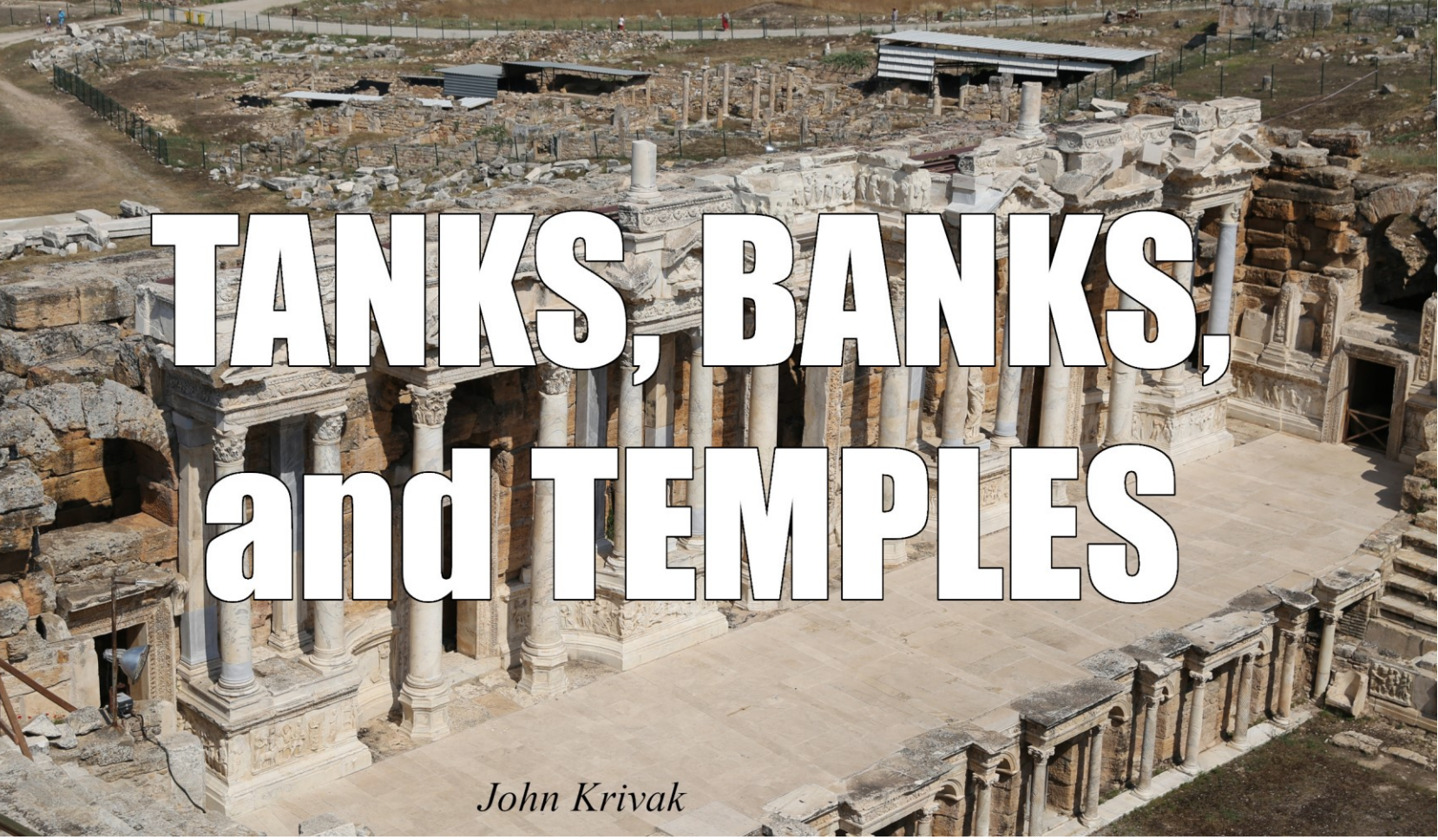

TANKS, BANKS, and TEMPLES

John Krivak

Early on, a preacher gave advice that changed my life. He recommended that every Christian—whether married or not; whether a parent or not—should commit to reading one book every year on marriage and one book every year on parenting. As a new Christian, I wondered: what do these family concerns have to do with Jesus, with church? It eventually became obvious that Christianity, if it is about any one single thing, is about relationships (the Bible speaks of relationship as "love" or "covenant"). And family relationships are clearly the most predominant and, arguably, the most important of all. Even with both God and with other Christians in the church, we are to relate according to family models.

Since then, I have read many such books, and the Bible as well. The three roles—husband, father, and Christian—have blended together in a most enlightening and satisfying way. The more time passes, the more deeply I am shaped and defined by my vital relationships. The return has been strength and stability that wisdom brings: *"You enlarge my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped"* (Psalm 18:36, NASB). So long as vital connections to God and family are secure, the downturns of life may be endured and their damage is minimized. There is no greater good.

Relationship with children.

My favorite book on parenting is *How To Really Love Your Child*, by Ross Campbell. Children often do not feel loved, even when they are loved. To make love "felt" requires eye contact, focused attention, physical contact, and corrective discipline. Children have an "emotional tank" inside. When parents make love felt, the tank fills and creates a happy, well-adjusted, and disciplined child. However, if the tank empties, the child will behave poorly. But a wise parent will know that bad behavior does not always indicate rebellion and badness. It is wise to first consider physical needs (hunger, sickness, or sleep issues). After this, the tantrums and outbursts may (or may not) indicate an empty "emotional tank." Behaving badly is often the child's inarticulate way of asking mom and dad their most important question: *"Do you really love me?"* This signals a need for love to be reaffirmed. Applying physical (corrective) discipline under these circumstances is harmful! One should not spank a child crying for help or love. The "rod of correction" is helpful only when the parent has ruled out physical or emotional needs. The child, in this case, may be engaging in actual disobedience and rebellion. By carefully attending to physical

and emotional needs, the level in the "emotional tank" stays high and discipline is rare and effective.

Relating to husband or wife.

My favorite marriage book is *His Needs, Her Needs* by Willard F. Harley, Jr. The premise is a large-scale survey of husbands and wives that identified top relational needs. This research surfaced the top five needs, one list for her and one list for him. If you guessed that the two lists were similar (or identical), the research proves you wrong! In fact, the two lists share not a single common need between husbands and wives. Yet, most spouses begin marriage believing that her needs are the same as his, and vice versa! Then, with the true needs going unmet, the couple finds that—in spite of best intentions—their marriage is running short on satisfaction and happiness. Harley identifies the "love bank" as the place where critical evaluations are made. Every husband or wife has one, and knows its level precisely. If a relational need is met, a deposit registers in the love bank. But if some need on the list goes unmet, the bank records a withdrawal. A large account registers the evaluation: my spouse loves me! An account that runs low into deficit signals a lack of love. Any marriage that has a low balance in one "love tank" (or in both) is in the danger zone for an extramarital affair.[10] People are desperate to have their love needs met.

Harley is right. It might be argued that wedding vows alone should be enough to ward off and rule out infidelity. And, there is no justification for adultery, even when love runs low. But that temptation may be faced either in relational strength (high balance in the "love bank") or in relational weakness (deficient balance). A marriage may be either vulnerable, or immune, to an affair. Harley's warning embraces the same wisdom as this quote from J. Allan Peterson:

> "Most people get married believing a myth—that marriage is a beautiful box full of all the things they have longed for: companionship, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, friendship. The truth is that marriage, at the start, is an empty box. You must put something in before you can take anything out. There is no love in marriage; love is in people, and people put it into marriage. There is no romance in marriage; people have to infuse it into their marriages. A couple must learn the art and form the habit of giving, loving, serving, praising—keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will empty."

Attending to the account balance in the "love bank" is a good way to evaluate the strength of a marriage.

What people need from relationships.

Eventually came a burst of insight. Marriage and parenting relationships—one built around a "love bank" and the other around an "emotional tank"—are conceptually alike. Human beings need love. They are empty without it, and any deficit of love is likely to result in bad behavior. That sinful expression may be an act of rebellion. It may be a cry for help. Or, it may simply be an act of desperation driven by the unmet need for love. This is a "felt need." Even when our partner in relationship loves genuinely with pure intention, we may not "feel" the love. A husband may think that his love is expressed in busy attention to career, but his wife and children may be suffering neglect. It takes relational expertise to keep their bank (or their tanks) filled.

There may be other ways (than reading) to gain skill in relating. For some (especially for women, it seems), it may come naturally by intuition. They just know. Often, when sharing with Becky a gem of insight that I found in some book, she would say: *"Oh, yes—I already knew that!"* Others may have been fortunate to observe such skills in a model relationship—perhaps in their childhood home. But for many (like me), the preacher was right: you can get it from a book! You may be a total clod, lacking skills and know-how. You may have been born into dysfunction, and may emerge from that with all the wrong tendencies. Even so, reading can hand you the keys to success. And above all other books, the Bible is a treasure of relational wisdom.

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[10] The subtitle for *His Needs, Her Needs* is "Building an Affair-Proof Marriage."

God and kenosis in relationships.

We who are human were created to feel emptiness (kenosis) when our relationship to God is broken. Even though He loves us, we may not feel loved. Augustine expressed it like this: *"Lord, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you"* (*Confessions* 1.1.1.). Deep inside, we have an aching emptiness that only God can fill and satisfy. Some say that we have a "God-shaped hole" deep inside, at the very core of who we are. People try to fill the void a thousand different ways, yet nothing but God truly satisfies. Chalk it up to being created in His image. Connect, or suffer emptiness. We have spoken of emptiness in "emotional tanks" and "love banks." No surprise, then, that we sense emptiness that begs for filling from God. Call it "the empty temple" (1 Cor. 6:19). Of course, until God fills us with the Holy Spirit, we have not even an inkling that, inside us, there is an empty temple. But God knows. At best, we have a vague awareness that something vital is missing.

Being empty leads to bad behavior. We get bad behavior from children when they have low "emotional tanks." Similarly, the root of marital infidelity can often be traced to an account in the "love bank" that has gone negative. Surely having emptiness (where God should be) is a causal factor in universal sin among humans. Sin causes emptiness; and then, emptiness leads to more sin. Romans 7 describes the pre-Christian emptiness[11] in Paul's personal experience:

> *For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*
>
> Romans 7:14–24

The driver for this helpless plunge into sinful living is the "empty temple." We are sure losers when we try to succeed alone and unaided, reduced to our own "fleshly" strength. Isn't this essentially identical to the badness and sinfulness that we saw with empty tanks and banks? At root, it's a love issue. I can easily imagine a misbehaving child, or an adulterous spouse, trying to explain themselves in precisely the same terms as Paul did:

- "I know it was wrong to kill our neighbor's pet duck, but I just couldn't help myself. I know it was wrong and I feel terrible about it now."
- "I didn't start out to have an affair[12]—it just happened. It was like something inside of

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[11] Paul identifies this experience with a "flesh" way of life. It happened while he was under the OT Law, or Torah. Living by flesh means living empty. It shows in feeble failure against the overwhelming power of sin. In contrast, Christians enjoy empowered sanctification when the Spirit indwells (Romans 8). Paul described the baptismal breaking-free from sin's power in Romans 6. Thus, Romans 7 should be read as pre-Christian, antithetical to the Christian experience of the chapters before and after. Slavery and weakness give way, through Jesus and His Spirit, to the truly Christian experience of freedom and power.

[12] Notice that "living by Spirit" typically brings "living by flesh" to an end: *"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Gal. 5:24). And again (Rom. 6:17-18): *"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."* Paul would insist that fleshly capitulating to sin disqualifies entrance into the Kingdom (1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 5:21), just as Jesus insisted that entrance be blocked against those who were not *"born again"* (John

me snapped, like I became a different person. I never thought I could do something like this. I feel so terrible now."

Whether emptiness is in the tank, in the bank, or in the temple—bad behavior and sinful deeds happen in an experience of helplessness. It's a love issue.

So, God tended to our core emptiness, our deep inner kenosis. He sent the Spirit into our hearts to convey His love and make that felt (Romans 5:5). And He so loved, that God gave His Son (John 3:16). Son and Spirit (each a gift from God) mark the biggest difference between the Old and New Covenants. What love! To end our emptiness, Jesus made himself empty:

> *"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..."*
>
> Philippians 2:5–7

Emptied himself! How? By taking the Cross! And by emptying himself, exalted Lord Jesus is able to fill our empty temples with divine Presence:

> *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."*
>
> Ephesians 3:14–19

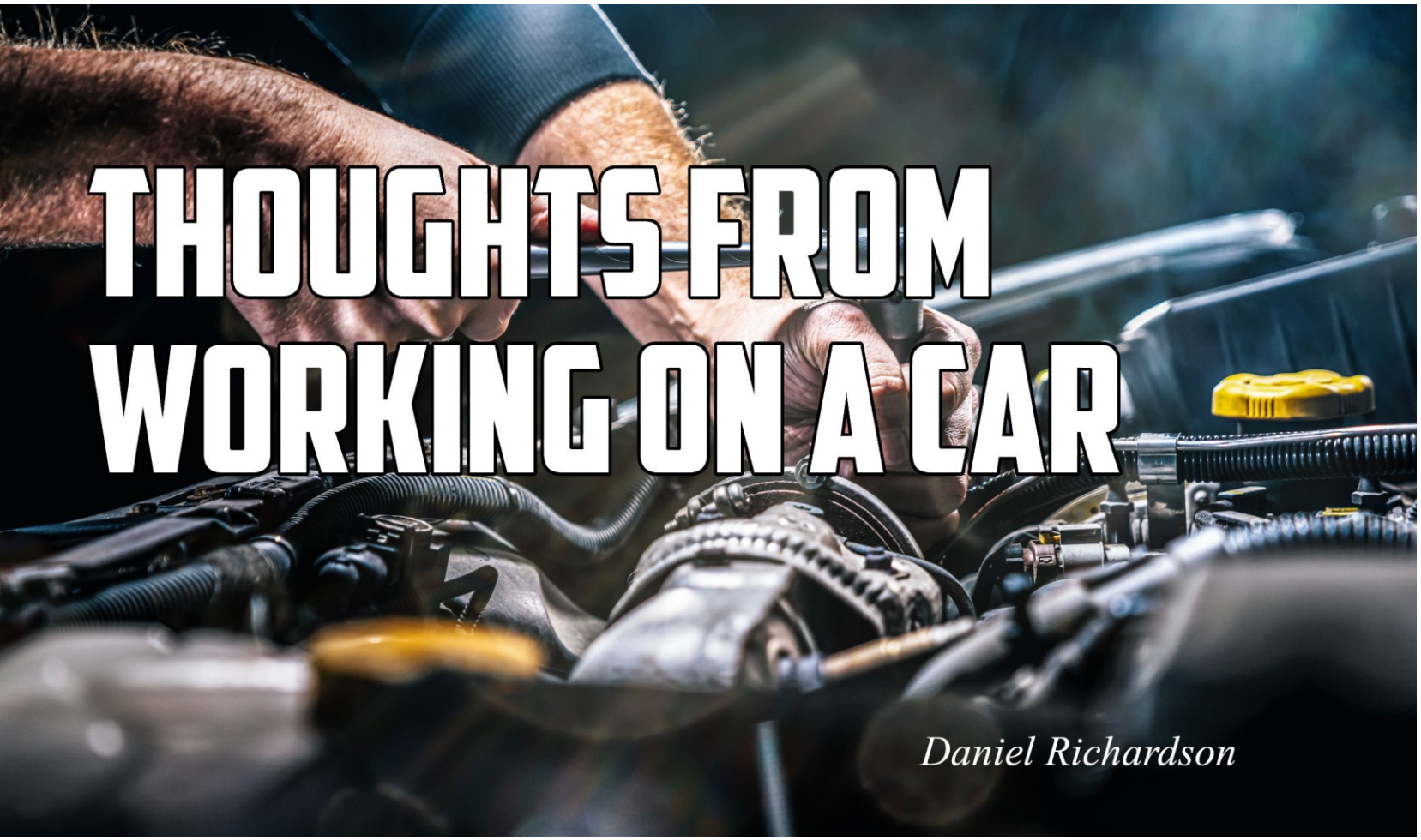
And when we answer with a full self-sacrifice of our own, Jesus begins to dwell within us:

> *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*
>
> Galatians 2:20

He is now "in us"; and we are "in Him." Our inner being is filled completely. We can feel the love. God's Presence fills our inner temple through Son and Spirit.

Function; or dysfunction? Human society, in vast population, creates a huge economy of love. It boggles the mind to consider the emptiness—all the emotional tanks, and love banks, and spiritual temples. Parents can fill the child's tank, but only as they are filled themselves. When a wife is running on empty, she will struggle to keep a husband's love bank in positive balance. Empty people tend toward dysfunction. Little wonder relationships are fragile, easily broken. The world needs a Savior to back the "love economy" with enough love to supply the whole system. Love sent Jesus (and the Spirit) into the world. Love drove Jesus to the Cross. God offers a filling from the love poured out when Jesus emptied himself. All people are called to salvation's offer when the Gospel is preached. Every new Christian now can love, because Jesus first loved us. Perhaps one day soon, the swell of emptiness will reach one of those historical tipping points that creates large-scale conversions, and love will flow abundantly. The day may come when relationships again thrive and flourish.

3:5). If so, is it impossible to find adultery in a Christian marriage? It depends on how deliberate is the Christian in faith and love! Having begun by the Spirit, the Christian may revert to fleshly weakness: *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ"* (1 Cor. 3:1, see also Gal. 3:1-4). One may suddenly refuse the Spirit's help and strength, to fall back into collapse in the weakness of flesh. A tank, bank, or temple—once filled—may run dry and empty without deliberate and constant filling.



THOUGHTS FROM WORKING ON A CAR

Daniel Richardson

Recently one of my sons and I, mostly him since he is more of an expert, were trying to repair a door lock actuator on one of our cars. It was my car and not his, so he was under no obligation to help, but he is always willing to do so. From this seemingly small job, several spiritual principles were brought to light.

Do Your Research

The first, do your research. Before we even tore the door panel off, we suspected the culprit was a small circle spring that research had shown was a fairly common issue on this model. Knowing what to look for made the job at least somewhat familiar when we got the door panel off. God has given us all the research material we need for our spiritual lives. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Spiritually speaking, we do not need any other book or creed to provide us direction, guidance, or doctrine. God's Word gives us all we need to be complete. God's Word has it all and is all.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward.

Psalm 19:7-11

And Psalm 119:105 is one we all know, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

Do your research.

Details Matter

Second, details matter. We were right, our research had led us down the correct path. The spring was the problem, sort of, but it wasn't broken. It wasn't even there, and neither was the moving swinging clip thing it hooked to. We figured no one took the door panel off and took the spring and clip

off. Anyone who has ever wrestled taking interior car door panels off and replacing them knows that no one does this for fun—so we figured no one had taken it off. We looked inside the bottom of the door and lo and behold, both parts were just floating around inside the bottom of the door, and they were not even broken. We were in luck, we were not even going to have to buy any parts, or so we thought. More to come on that later.

God has always been concerned with the details from the beginning of time. Adam and Eve had one tree specifically they could not eat of (Genesis 2:15-17). Nadab and Abihu were given specific detailed instructions on what type of fire to use for their offerings in Leviticus 10. The tabernacle had numerous details laid out for its construction in Exodus 25-31. It is imperative that when we do our research through studying God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15), we pay attention to the details He has for us. Details such as how to obtain salvation. Details such as how He desires for us to worship Him. Details matter.

Look at the Big Picture

While we were working on the door lock actuator, we kept trying to fit the pin on the end of the spring in this tiny hole and we actually got it in there a couple of times, but it would not stay, and it did not make the lock work right when it did stay. We had been watching the YouTube videos on my small phone screen and couldn't see the details very clearly. If we had watched the videos on the big screen TV in the house, the details would have been much clearer and we would have been able to see the spring pin was supposed to go into a slot, and the slot was much easier to get the pin into. So this point is, look at the big picture. If we had been looking at the big picture (big TV versus little phone screen) the details would have been much clearer. Spiritually, we need to look at the big picture: heaven. When we look at heaven, things on earth become so much clearer. Things are put into perspective. Suffering seems not so bad when we realize it is only temporal and we will one day have a life of no suffering. Unsurmountable bills do not look so unsurmountable when we look toward heaven. Grief and loss are eased when we look toward heaven. Christ looked up to heaven when on the cross in John 17. Paul looked toward heaven, pressed on toward heaven even after suffering numerous trials on this earth (Philippians 3:12-14). We must focus on the big picture especially when this earthly life presents the challenges we all have, and especially when the devil tries to get us to look away and lose focus.

Be Prepared

The next principle we learned from this job is to be prepared. I know from experience that when you take off door panels, you almost always break at least one clip, or five, as was the case this time. If I had been properly prepared, I would have ordered some extra ahead of time instead of waiting until we got into the job and broke some. Now, we have to wait two days to finish the job but at least all is done but putting the panel back on. God has always expected His people to be prepared, and why wouldn't He? Look at the preparations He has made for us. He prepared this earth for us (Genesis 1). He has prepared the plan of salvation for us through the giving of His Son (John 3:16). He has prepared a way of escape for us when Satan brings temptations our way (1 Corinthians 10:13).

As Christians, we must be prepared. We must be prepared to teach. This goes back to point one, research. Study. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We need to be prepared for Satan. Three times Satan tempted Jesus and three times Jesus used scripture as a rebuttal (Matthew 4:1-11). We can't rebuke Satan with scripture if we do not know it, so we must prepare ourselves. We must be prepared to resist Satan so he doesn't eat us for lunch (1 Peter 5:8-10). If we prepare ourselves for the times the devil attacks, we will be that much more equipped to handle that temptation.

Work Together

This job would have been much harder with only one person. Christians have each other to help in this life. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10). "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2). "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). We need each other. Barnabas was a great source of encouragement for the first century church. He worked alongside Paul, spreading the

word, leading others to Jesus, making Paul's work lighter. Many hands make light work. If everyone at your congregation put in the same effort that you did, would much get accomplished? Would everyone be a bench warmer or would the congregation thrive? Let us make a renewed effort to work together for the common goals of glorifying God through the teaching of His word and doing His will.

Enjoy Togetherness

The last point is enjoy your time with family and fellow Christians. Even though the job we did was somewhat of a pain, even though it could have been easier if we had paid attention to the details more and seen the big picture to start with, the job was made more enjoyable because I was working with and spending time with my son. In Acts 2, the Christians met daily to fellowship, strengthen each other, and spend time together. We need to enjoy the time we have with our physical families while we can. I recently had a daughter get married and move away. I don't get to see her as often as the children that still live with us. We all have experienced the loss of loved ones and always wished we had spent more time together. We need to enjoy the time we have with our loved ones, with our Christian families and when we are with them, we need to engage with them. Put our cell phones down, tune out other distractions and respect those we are with by actually engaging with them and not just being in their vicinity.

Conclusion

I hope the lessons I learned from this small job, both physical and spiritual can be useful to you in some way. To recap, we need to do our research, know the details matter, look at the big picture, be prepared, work together, and enjoy our time together.

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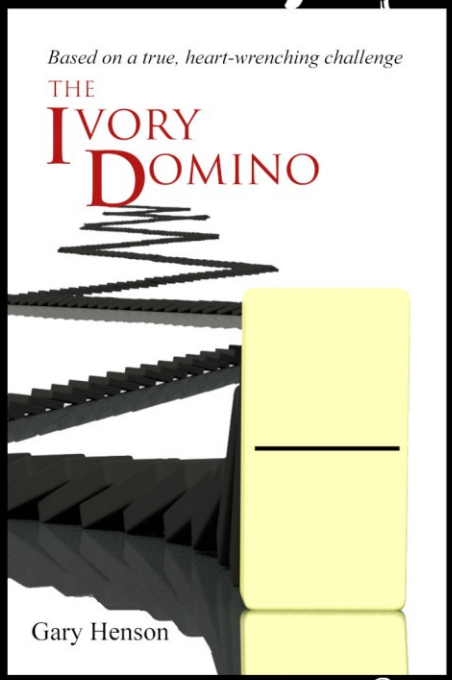
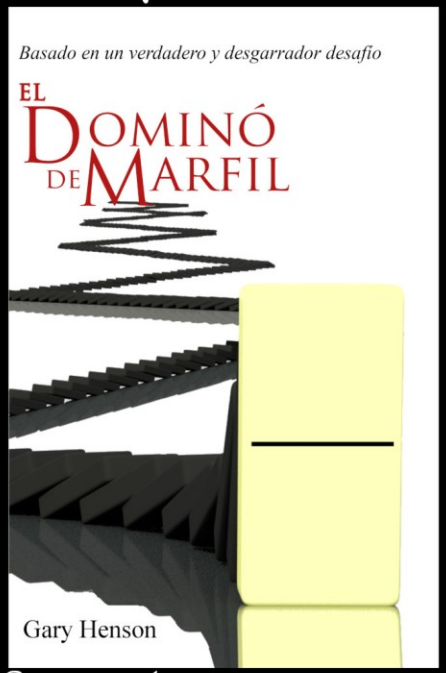
Muscle and a Shovel
you won't want to miss
THE IVORY DOMINO
about one young man's journey out of Catholicism





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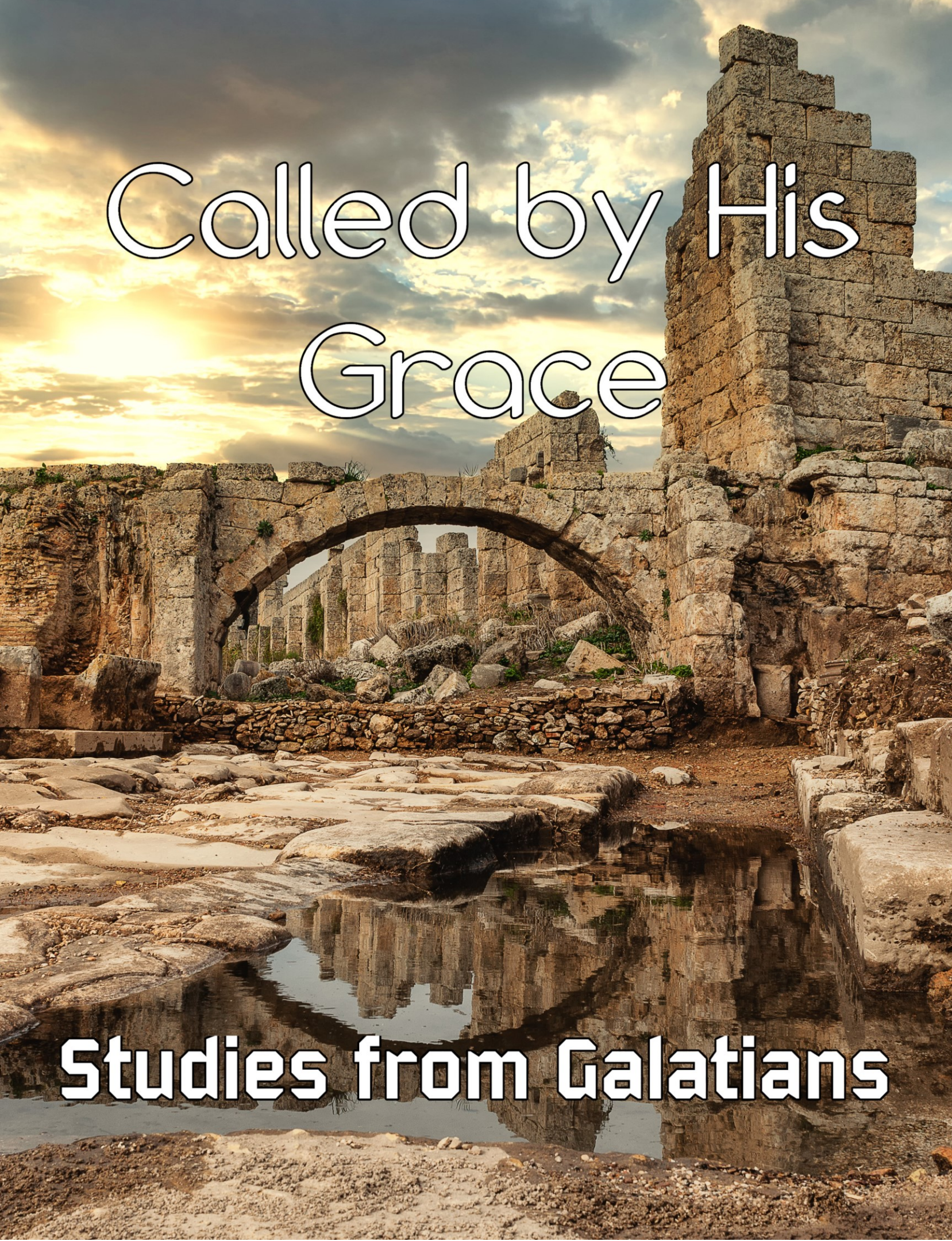

Called by His Grace
Studies from Galatians

Galatians: Some Overall Thoughts

Gantt Carter

The letter known today as "Galatians" is one of the earliest documents from within the early church. The letter is perhaps the earliest writing we have from an inspired apostle of Jesus, and almost certainly the first letter we have from Paul. These early works give us exceptional insight into the needs, problems, and successes of the first disciples. It is a relatively brief letter (just 149 verses), but it is a letter packed with much valuable truth, and it comes with quite an emotional impact, as well.

The Author

The human author is the apostle Paul (Galatians 1:1). The "vibe," the writing style, and the vocabulary all match those of Paul's with no issues. We see his usual Greek/Jewish combination greeting in the salutation, and then his common benediction at the close of the letter. Pauline authorship has been the accepted conclusion, with no one questioning the idea throughout the centuries (other than a few skeptics in the nineteenth century).

The Recipients

Whose mail are we reading? Who are these ancient Galatians to whom Paul addresses the letter in 1:1-2? There are two overall views on this question: The "North Galatian" view that this was an ethnic group; or the "South Galatia" view that this was a political region. The Northern view was popular early on, and then some archeological (see Sir William Ramsey) and exegetical work (see Ernest de Witt Burton) led the way to many accepting the Southern view. Given the Jewish populations in the South, the lack of good Roman roads in the North until after Paul died, and Paul's general practice of using Roman province names, the Southern perspective is a solid position.

Concerning the religious (and ethnic) background of the recipients, we find indications in the letter that this is a mixture of both Jewish and non-Jewish people. Please note 4:8-11, 21; 5:1.

The Timing

When did Paul write this letter to the Galatians? It has been common over the years to see the trip to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1-10 as the same trip Luke records in Acts 15. This writer is not so sure that is the best perspective on the matter. If Paul writes this letter after that meeting and decision, why is there no reference here to the decision reached or to the specific letter it produced (see Acts 15:22-33)? Another view is that Galatians 2:1-10 is the famine visit of Acts 11:27-30. This take is based on the South Galatian view and solves the potential issue of Paul leaving out a visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 1:18-2:10. One can take the South view and still hold to a later date, but it is more difficult to take that approach.

I submit that Paul dictates this letter sometime after his trip with Barnabas, recorded by Luke in Acts 13-14, and before the meeting found in Acts 15. The meeting seems to occur in 48 or 49, If so, then this letter is the earliest Paul writes, at least that we are of today. Did he write it in Jerusalem, right before (perhaps even the night before) the meeting? Perhaps.

The Teaching—Concern & Caution

In this letter, Paul defends himself, as he defends his gospel, the gospel of King Jesus. Those he writes against were not just opposing Paul, they were opposing the gospel! He thus defends himself against the claim that his gospel was second-hand and mistaken. As a real apostle, he possesses authority from Jesus himself, and he writes this letter as a part of his role/task as an apostle.

As we read Galatians, we see an emphasis on Jesus and the "gospel." Note especially sections like 1:3-4, 6-9, 11, 16, 23; 2:2, 5-7, 14, 20; 3:1-8; 4:1-7, 13.

Before we are five verses into the letter, Paul declares that Jesus "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age" (1:4). He then continues to explore what the God of Israel has done in the King, rescuing us from the present age/world and

beginning the new one. The old world is still running along, but the new world, the new creation has already commenced in the King!

Galatians 4:19, just past the middle of the letter, contains another key statement. This entire movement is about the Messiah formed in us – about us being shaped by Jesus! We put him on in baptism (3:27), and he lives in us (2:20).

Paul writes to the newly converted, to those dealing with their turn from idolatry (4:8-11; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). They faced many challenges to their new faithfulness toward Jesus. They lived in an area of the world where rejecting pagan gods was far from an easy way to conduct their lives. Then many of the ethnic Jews were antagonistic toward those following Jesus, and even among the Jews who converted, some were not always accepting of non-Jews (see Acts 13:45-51; cf. Galatians 2:11-14). The Jews enjoyed certain exceptions under Roman rule, so there was a unique pressure to continue to follow the ways of the Torah, and to apply that pressure to those now belonging to Jesus.

The apostle is aware of all the different tensions among these converts. He is also personally wounded by just how abruptly they have turned away from the true gospel he taught them (Galatians 1:6-10; 4:12-20).

In connection with these pressures, we see the topic of circumcision several times in the letter. Circumcision (for religious purposes) was part of the old world, and those in Jesus are no longer a part of that world. Because of this distinction, we see that trying to still live under the Old Covenant or living in paganism both placed them the same basic theological boat (see Galatians 4:8-11). What is it that means one is God's child? Is it circumcision and feast keeping? Or is it being first in the Messiah (3:26-29)? Is it then an ongoing loyalty (faith) toward Him as we walk in love toward others? See 5:1-6, along with 7-15.

In this letter, Paul does not support either the idea of a license to sin or of a strict performance-based stance before God. He upholds the work of the Messiah and the way we are to live for Him (and in Him). Paul does not teach mental assent alone for justification in this letter – especially considering 2:19-20; 3:26-29; 5:24, along with all of chapters 5-6. Holiness and unity are both stressed throughout this letter.

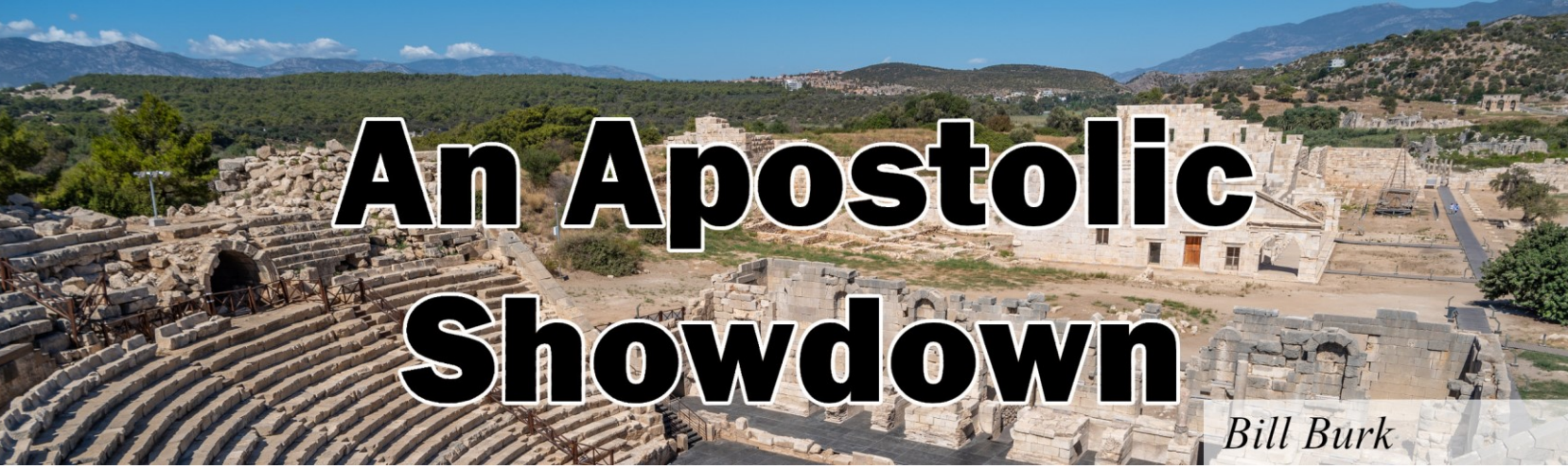
Some see this letter as primarily about sin and salvation, while others suggest that it is more about who should be considered as part of the one family of God. Unity is particularly important in this letter. Paul writes about Abraham only having one family, not two (3:23-29). It is helpful for us, if nothing else, to try to read these texts within their First Century setting. If we are not careful, we may end up reading with, say, 16th-century glasses.

A glorious truth! No matter your ethnicity, your religious heritage, or your political status, etc.– Jesus unites us in him. Non-Jews are not "Gentile sinners" (2:15-16, 20-21) if they are in the Messiah who died for them, too! Then and today, we find our identity in Jesus, not in some genealogy or human views of status.

But what about the Law of Moses, the Torah? It is not a dreadful thing, it was God-given; however, it was given for specific purposes, which it served (Galatians 3:21-22; cf. Romans 7:1-12; 8:1-4). As someone has observed, you can use a tuning fork to prepare for the performance, but you do not play the concerto with the fork. The Law was for a temporary period between the giving of the promise to Abraham and its final fulfillment in the Messiah. The cross exposes that the Law of Moses can only take someone so far (Galatians 2:21; 3:21-25) – being heirs of God and recipients of his inheritance is only in the Messiah (3:29).

As we near the close of the letter, we discover what may serve as a summary of the whole writing (connecting back to 1:4; 3:29; and 5:6): "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (6:15-16).

What happened in Galatia after they received Paul's letter? Did they fully turn back to the one gospel? Did some of them accept circumcision, despite the warnings? What happened to those who had come in after Paul, those who were trying to discredit him? We do not have a 2 Galatians to help us clear up the rest of the story, unfortunately. Let us hope that they listened to the Holy Spirit's concerns and heeded His alarms. Regardless of what they did or did not do, may we take to heart the letter sent to them.



An Apostolic Showdown

Bill Burk

The Book of Galatians covers law and its relationship to the Christian (1-4); liberty, that is, how the gospel sets him from the penalty of sin (5:1); and finally, the lifestyle he should live after believing and obeying the truth (5:2-6:18). In the opening chapter of the book, Paul warns the Galatian Christians against turning away from the true gospel to a false one (1:6-9). The context helps the reader to conclude that the error Paul had in mind involved Judaizing teaching. Judaizers sought to bind the requirements of the Law of Moses on Gentile believers for salvation (cf. Acts 15:1-2). Following such instruction would cause those who adhered to it to "fall from grace" (5:4). God does not justify men through works of the law but through faith in Christ (2:16; 3:11; 3:26-29). Paul states that if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain (2:21). The faithful apostle knew this message did not please his Jewish brethren, but pleasing men did not concern him (1:10).

In Paul's day, not everyone successfully withstood the temptation to please men, even some leaders in the church (2:6-10). Galatians 2:11-21 describes Paul's rebuke of the apostle Peter because he yielded to peer pressure and refused to eat with his Gentile brethren in the presence of some Jews. His sinful conduct negatively influenced the noble Barnabas (Acts 11:23-25), who, in like fashion, committed the sin of partiality (2:11-13; cf. Jas. 2:1-13). This led to the apostolic showdown between Paul and Peter because the latter was not straightforward about the gospel. Thus, Paul rebuked him to his face (2:14). Consider these lessons one might learn from this famous conflict.

1. ***Conviction Demands Consistency***. The apostle Peter represents the first man recorded in the Bible to preach the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 10). Then, he masterfully defended his actions before his Jewish brethren in Acts 11. Yet, when faced with the pressure to disassociate with his Gentile brethren because of bigoted Jews, he succumbed. Although every Christian stumbles occasionally (1 Jn. 1:8), he should continually pursue consistency and, like his Lord, practice what he professes (Jn. 8:29; Acts 1:1; cf. Jas. 1:22).

2. ***Truth Demands Loyalty***. As one studies the Book of Galatians, he quickly sees Paul's loyalty to the gospel's truth (1:10; 2:1-5, 11-12, 20-21; 4:12-16; 5:11; 6:14). Elsewhere, Paul spoke of how he was not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) and how he determined not to know anything among his brethren except Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul was always "appointed for the defense of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17), ready to preach the message of Christ at any moment (1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:2).

3. ***Preaching Demands Bravery***. In preaching the truth, Paul used great boldness of speech (2 Cor. 3:12). His earnest expectation and hope were that he would be ashamed of nothing. Still, with all boldness, as always, his desire was for Christ to be magnified in his body, whether by life or death (Phil. 1:20). It took great courage to stand up to Peter (2:11-12). Yet he did. He was willing to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and teaching despite the itching ears of many of his hearers (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

One of the most heartwarming truths associated with the showdown between the apostles Paul and Peter is this: despite the public shaming he received, Peter did not hold it against Paul. In his second letter, he referred to him as "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15). No one should enjoy conflict, especially with fellow members of the body of Christ. Still, when conflict arises, Christians need to remember the lessons learned from the interaction between Paul and Peter: conviction demands consistency, truth demands loyalty, and preaching demands bravery.

Jesus assured us that the smallest letter in – and the least commandment of – God's word was significant (see Matt. 5:18-19). In this respect, the whole of God's word carries equal weight. Yet Jesus also revealed the obvious – some commandments are weightier than others (Matt. 23:23).

While we should not dismiss any single commandment, promise, or description in Scripture, we should recognize that some places speak of weightier matters than others. We speak of "key verses" and "key books." In Galatians 3 we find one of the key chapters in all of Holy Writ.

Galatians may be divided into three sections. The first section (chapters 1-2) is personal. The last section (5-6) is practical. The middle section (3-4) is doctrinal. Chapter 3 reveals much about the purpose and length of the law (temporary), while comparing it to the great Abrahamic promise (overarching).

This article's purpose is to briefly discuss verses 7-21 in this great chapter. While it is impossible to address every point of interest, we do wish to familiarize ourselves with the overarching theme discussed.

If we include verse 6 in our passage, Paul makes some 17 references to the Old Testament, with direct quotations taken from Genesis 12:3, 7; 15:6; 18:18; Deut. 21:23; 27:26; Lev. 18:5; Hab. 2:4. (The careful student will consider each of these passages in their own context before contemplating how the Holy Spirit applies them in light of the Christ.) The Holy Spirit, through the pen of Paul, argues with force that God justifies all peoples through faith by way of the promise and not by works of the law.

Father of the Faithful

Though Moses was central to the life of the Jews (see Jn. 9:28), It is Abraham's faith, not the faith of Moses, that Paul highlights. While the Jews claimed Abraham as their father (Matt. 3:9) it wasn't a physical lineage that was important. Abraham is "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16). He is the father of all who have faith.

The good news was preached by the apostles and early Christians that Gentiles can be fellow heirs and members of the same body. This was a mystery revealed fully by the gospel (Eph. 3:6). The fact that this aspect of the gospel was proclaimed to Abraham in the long ago is significant.

The Primacy of the Promise

The promise given to Abraham, first in Genesis 12 and again in more detail in Genesis 15, predates the law given through Moses by over four centuries (Gal. 3:17). The most important aspect of this promise was that through Abraham's seed all people would be blessed.

The law did not annul or in any way overshadow the promise. If the promise continued to hold force through the law, one might ask, why the law? It was added "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19). The law came not to create transgressions, but to shine a spotlight upon them. It showed the sinfulness of sin, and the helplessness of mankind to deal with the ramifications of sin (see Romans 7).

Later in this section, the law is seen as a temporary measure, whose purpose was to bring mankind from the promise to its fulfillment (Gal. 3:23-25).

The law was inferior to the promise and to the promise's fulfillment in Christ. The law was put in place by an "intermediary" (Gal. 3:19). Moses was that intermediary, who "stood between the Lord" and the people (Deut. 5:5). No such intermediary was used when God gave the promise to Abraham, nor was an intermediary needed when Christ fulfilled that promise.

The Covenant of faith

The promise was more than just a promissory note issued by God. It was a covenant (Gal. 3:17), entered into by Yahweh himself. The covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 is instructive.

Typically, two parties would participate and assume both the responsibilities of the covenant and the curses of failing the covenant. But just when the ceremony should have begun, "a deep sleep fell on Abram" (Gen. 15:12). God participates alone in this ceremony, guaranteeing that He, and He alone, was responsible for its execution.

While the law was not contrary to the promise (it was given to serve the promise not to override it), the law could not give life, could not bring righteousness, could not guarantee inheritance. All these things could only come through Christ.

When we enter the covenant of Christ, we become sons of God through the faith. We become Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:26, 29). We stand in the blessing of the promise because of the redemption of the Christ. Praise God for this spectacular gift!

Breaking Down an Allegory

Neal Pollard

Paul repeatedly makes the point that being under the law is being in bondage, being enslaved. I find it interesting that Paul says, "It is written," but does not quote a specific passage. Instead, he summarizes these two well-known Bible characters and their status in the life of Abraham. The whole summary here is an "allegory" (24). William Arndt tells us an allegory is simply "to use analogy or likeness to express something" (BDAG 46). Paul compares the situation between Sarah and Hagar to being justified by law and justified by faith. While he adapts the historical place and significance of some of the events to accommodate his point (for example, in Genesis Sarah corresponds to the Jewish nation, but in Galatians Hagar corresponds to the Jewish nation).

So, let's look at how Paul makes his point about the enslaving nature of the law compared to the freedom of Christ by understanding this allegory better.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE ALLEGORY:

- Abraham had two sons: one by the bondwoman (Hagar) and one by the free woman (Sarah) (22)
- The son by Hagar was "according to the flesh" (Abraham and Hagar were able to do this naturally) (23)
- The son by Sarah was "according to the promise" (Abraham and Sarah were only able to do this supernaturally—it involved divine intervention) (23)

THE EXPLANATION OF THE ALLEGORY:

- Hagar represents the Old Law (24), Mt. Sinai (25), "present" (earthly) Jerusalem (25), and the slavery of the law (25)
- Sarah represents the new covenant (24), the cross, "the Jerusalem above" (26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12), and the freedom brought by Christ (cf. 5:13).
- Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, represents the Judaizers who persecute Christians for their faith in Christ (29).
- Isaac, Abraham's son by Sarah, represents Christians—those justified by faith in Christ (28).

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE ALLEGORY:

- Don't seek to be in bondage to the law because you cannot be a rightful heir through the Law (30)
- Christians are the children of promise, not those seeking justification by the Law (31; cf. 3:26-29).

Perhaps this allegory does not have the impact on us that it did for natural-born Jews or those who lived when the Old Law had just been taken out of the way by the sacrifice of Jesus. But, as Bible students who understand the unfolding and eternal scheme of redemption, we should appreciate this analogy. We are recipients and beneficiaries of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 22:18).

THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF

Nathan Franson

A man was so broke, he stole his wife's jewelry and sold it. Things in his life got so bad he even ended up homeless. On one occasion he slept at the New York bus station for three days, unable to pay rent or afford food. His lowest point came when he tried to sell his dog at the liquor store to any stranger. He had no money to feed the dog, so he sold it for $25 and walked away crying. Two weeks later, he saw a boxing match between Mohammed Ali and Chuck Wepner. It inspired him to write the script for a movie called, *Rocky*. The man was Sylvester Stallone. He tried to sell the screenplay and received an offer for $125,000, but he had just one request. He wanted to star in the movie. The studio declined. They wanted a real star and told him he "looked funny and talked funny." So, he left with his script. A few weeks later, the studio offered him $250,000. He refused. They then offered $350,000. He still refused. They wanted his movie, but not him. He said no, and demanded to be in the movie. After a while the studio agreed, but gave him only $35,000 for the script. However, they let him star in it. The movie won Best Picture, Best Directing, and Best Film Editing at the Academy Awards. He was even nominated for Best Actor.

No matter what you face in life, you can become the best version of yourself if you refuse to compromise your integrity. But how are you doing in your religious life? Being the best version of yourself spiritually means knowing *where* you stand. Paul writes,

> *"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal. 5:16-17).*

Every person has a war within themself. We will not reach the best of who we can be until tested. There was a sharp warning to Israel:

> *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 18:1-4)*

Following Christ will always be counter-cultural. We live in a world that wants to normalize sensitive subjects like abortion, immodesty, open sex, alternative lifestyles, etc. The moment one decides to repent, be baptized, and be added by the Lord to His church they immediately become an enemy to the world with a proverbial target on their back. No one wants to see you fail more than Satan. In fact, he will use the devices Paul mentioned earlier to entice you.

Being the best version of yourself spiritually also means knowing *how* you stand. Jesus gives an eye-opening example of someone who fell short of this.

Mark records,

> *Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may*

inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mk. 10:17-22).

There is always that one thing holding us back; one thing may be holding you back. Christianity can only be successfully achieved when we recognize our sinful state, and the character of Jesus Christ replaces that sinful disposition. God must live in us without any rival.

The author of Hebrews writes,

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

If we want to reach our spiritual potential, we must "be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2). No one knows what you are capable of except yourself. If you are not imitating Christ, you are not the best version of who you could be. The good news is that as long as we are alive, Christ affords us the opportunity to change.

Healthy Service to Others

Myron Bruce

From an early age, my parents taught me the importance of getting up early and working late. Not to say we did that every day, but still, my parents taught that principle. And growing up on a farm, the opportunity to 'work' was ever-present. But is there a difference between 'working' and 'serving'? Is there a distinction between the song, "Make Me a Servant," and singing the old-time favorite, "I Want to be a Worker for the Lord?"

If we want to explore healthy service, we need to define what it means to serve.

> DEFINITIONS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT GOD'S EXPECTATIONS ARE PARAMOUNT!
>
> MYRON BRUCE

A worker and a servant share similar traits. The worker is one who is employed, either publicly or privately, to perform a service(s). In their opportunity to work, they are able to create something useful. The servant, by definition, implies an expressed submission, recognizance, or debt to another. This individual is under an obligation to their 'employer.' Some rightly provide the prefix 'bond' before servant. Is there less freedom in serving as opposed to working?

To wrestle over the discrepancies would be an interesting endeavor, still, it's undeniable that the servant and the worker share a similar lot! Perhaps the question is not to ask the distinction between the two, but to determine the heart of both. If we are to better grasp the importance of a term so closely related to our life in Christ—SERVANT—we must closely consider how God's Word directs us. Definitions are important, but God's expectations are paramount!

To determine the servant's heart is to determine the worker's emotional health, and a good reference is found in the words of the prophet Daniel. The Israelites have fallen to the Babylonians and some of the smart, handsome youth from within the royal Jewish families were separated from their fate. The purpose of King Nebuchadnezzar was apparent, he wanted the best of the best. (Sounds familiar…but we need to leave that for another discussion.) One of those captive men was Daniel. And it's in his attitude in a difficult situation that we find the example of how to serve with a healthy attitude.

To prepare these youths for his service, the king removed them from the rest of the captives. They were to be given choice food and a Babylonian education. In this preparation we find the beginning stages of Daniel's healthy service. He doesn't fight back against his oppressors, and he isn't discourteous or hateful toward them. Remember, he's a captive and has been taken from a royal life in the house of Israel. We might say he has every right to be angry and contest against this enemy of God. Yet Daniel and his three friends stand firm in their resolve against the king's directive. Yes, there's strength in numbers, but these men have chosen to obey God as they respect their captors. The food provided by the king of Babylon would defile these Jewish boys and they knew it. So rather than protest in holy vindication, with respect they sought permission to not acquiesce. They request a simple vegan diet. Give us vegetables and water. No sweets or fats, just a simple, God-ordained spread. Read the dialogue between Daniel and Ashpenaz, the chief of the king's court officials as the conversation begins.

Daniel 1:11-13, (NAS)

Ashpenaz:

> *"I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."* (More than just getting fired!)

Daniel:

"Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

The respect and determination of Daniel is what we should aspire for in our service to others, controlled and respectful. Yet so often we are caught in the struggle between right vs. wrong, good vs. the evil, knowing we must 'fight for the right.' Perhaps we should take a page out of Daniel's playbook. Let's consider that healthy service is more about respect and patience then getting in the face of our opponent. It's more about honoring God and following His will than being the one who's right. Quoting from Hosea, Jesus echoed the words of God, "I desire compassion (mercy) and not sacrifice." Continuing in Daniel chapter one, note how their experiment turns out. These four men are taking a chance, in faith, to be obedient to God rather than "enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." At the end of the ten-day test, the appearance of Daniel and his friends is well-noted. The fear that Ashpenaz would lose his head is alleviated. Read Daniel 1:14-20 and note the effects of those who serve God with a healthy heart.

"So he (Ashpenaz) agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days, they looked HEALTHIER (emphasis added) *and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.*

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

The blessing God bestows upon Daniel and his companions is a testimony of the unfailing love of our God. To be dragged away and relocated to a tyrannical nation, hundreds of miles from the homeland, would be a fatal blow to the heart of service for many of us. But trusting that God is always in control (3:16-18), Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are willing to provide healthy service to their captors.

Perhaps the answer to how healthy our heart of service is can be found as we apply the lesson from Daniel. If we are to be obedient servants to God, living for Him and not this world, we must practice patience and respect with faithfulness in this unjust world. The healthy service we are called to give starts with a respectful heart. It's then and only then that you and I can serve others and impact our nation for the glory of God!

Paul's inspired words to the Christians in Galatia can bring it full circle for us. If we are to have healthy service for others, it will start within our own hearts.

"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one will bear his own load.

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

Galatians 6:1-10

Live seminar

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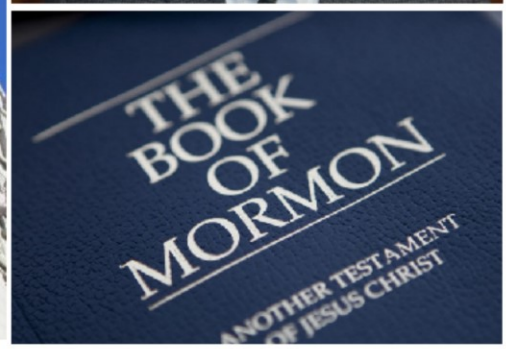
who spent 20 years in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints



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Jesus Washed Their Feet

Gerald Cowan

> *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet, I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*
>
> John 13:14-15

The Lord and His disciples had engaged a private room in which to eat the Passover (Luke 22:7-13). The host would ordinarily provide for the comfort and convenience of the guests, and would include facilities for washing the dust and dirt of the road from their feet (Luke 7:44). A servant might be appointed for the task, or the guests might see to it for themselves. The younger and lesser would serve the older and those they considered greater than themselves.

But these disciples were not inclined to serve each other. They had an ongoing dispute as to which of them should be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24, Mark 9:33-37 and 10:34-35). Jesus could have settled all such arguments by simply assigning a specific rank to each and naming one to be head over the others. But He did not do so. And they did not understand His enigmatic remarks about true greatness consisting of serving the needs of others. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first must be last of all and slave to all" (Mark 10:34-35).

The Example of Jesus

He reminded them that He Himself was among them "as one who serves" (Luke 22:27; compare Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45). He then gave them an object lesson in humble service by washing their feet (John 13:3-12). They were aware, to some extent, of the true greatness of this one they called Teacher and Lord (John 13:13). But Jesus knew His true greatness: all things were given into His hands by the Father. He had come from God, and when His mission was accomplished, as it soon would be, He would return to God (John 13:1, 3). He was deity wrapped in a servant's towel (Philippians 2:5-8).

The Symbolic Meaning of what He did Here

Peter, and no doubt the other disciples too, saw it first as a literal act of menial service, and protested that it should not be done by Jesus. But it was more than a lesson in personal physical hygiene. Jesus promised they would understand it afterwards (John 13:6-8). When the task was completed He asked them if they understood what He had done to them (13:12). Did they know its spiritual implication and application? We too must understand it if we are to follow the Lord's example and wash each other's feet (13:14-15).

A literal washing of feet would have little or no self-evident meaning for contemporary Western man. Of course, if such a literal washing is needed, it should be done. Some try to make the act merely symbolic, perhaps of fellowship or of mutual responsibilities. But surely Jesus was not enjoining a symbolic ritual for observance in church services. What then can it mean? There is the obvious lesson about humility and service: each disciple must be aware of the genuine needs of others and be willing to serve, without regard to relative rank or position. But there is more.

There is a deeper symbolic meaning to this parable being acted out by the Lord. John tells us that Jesus "laid aside" his garments in order to perform the task of a humble servant (13:4). The same verb, TITHEMI, is used in John 10:17-18 to denote Jesus "laying down" His life on behalf of others, the final humiliation of His death on the cross. This helps clarify His remarks about His disciples being cleansed fully by his action (13:8b-10). Their bodies needed only the washing of the feet to be restored to full cleanness – so He washed their feet. Their souls needed washing from sin to be restored to full cleanness, and He would do that for them when He gave His life's blood.

The Lord's motive for such giving of Himself was love. Having loved His own who were in the

world, He now showed the full extent of His love (John 13:1b, NIV).

Do as I have Done to You.

The Lord's disciples are to follow His example of loving service (13:15; compare also 13:34-35). "Love one another as I have loved you. and by this shall all men know that you are my disciples." We may wonder if that requires us to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). It means we must love
and serve the best interests of all men, even of our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). It certainly means we should do what is good for all, as we have the opportunity, and as proof that our faith is working through love (Gal. 6:10, 5:6 and 13).

What Are You Coming Together For?

Curtis Hartshorn

The book of Romans says:

> *"For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."*
>
> Romans 1:11-12

When we come together, it is to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. If you have been going to church week after week, year after year, it is easy to fall into a routine of seven-songs-a-sermon-and-a-prayer. When you do something repetitiously it can become mundane, even wearisome. You have a morning routine that you've done so many times you don't even have to be fully awake. You're driving to work trying to remember if you hung the towel up or not.

Attending worship can be the same way if you don't make a conscious effort to keep in mind the importance of what you are doing.

Part of the problem is we have turned "Church" into something we "go to" rather than what we "do." Worship is not a spectator event, where others serve while you sit back and watch. You may not be preaching the sermon or leading the songs or a prayer, but there is a purpose for your being with the saints.

Worship is not a spectator event, where others serve while you sit back and watch.

The real reason we assemble is so we "may be encouraged together …, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine." God has you to encourage others. No matter what age you are or how long you have been a Christian, there is someone or several someones who need your encouragement. Look around and identify someone whose faith you could lift up by sharing about your own faith.

Don't wait for someone to come to you. Take the initiative and see what you can do to brighten the day of a fellow brother or sister in Christ. It is a spiritual gift you should be giving to others.

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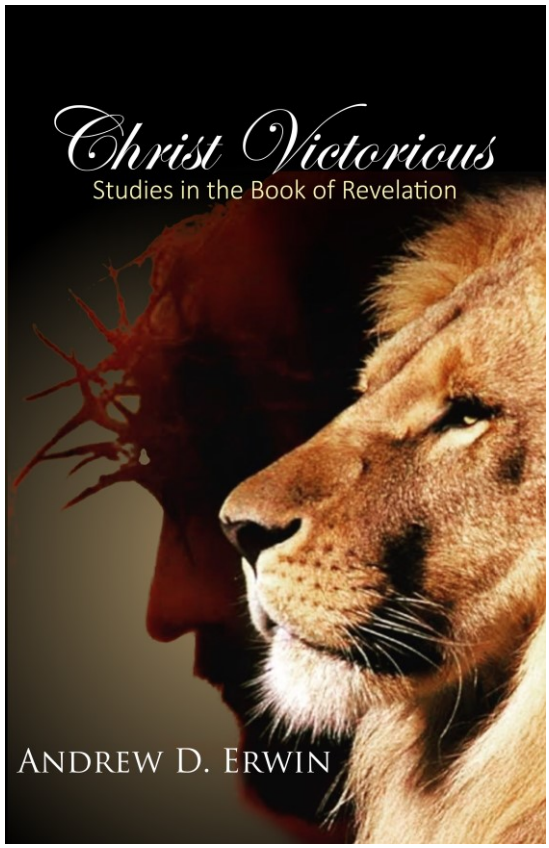

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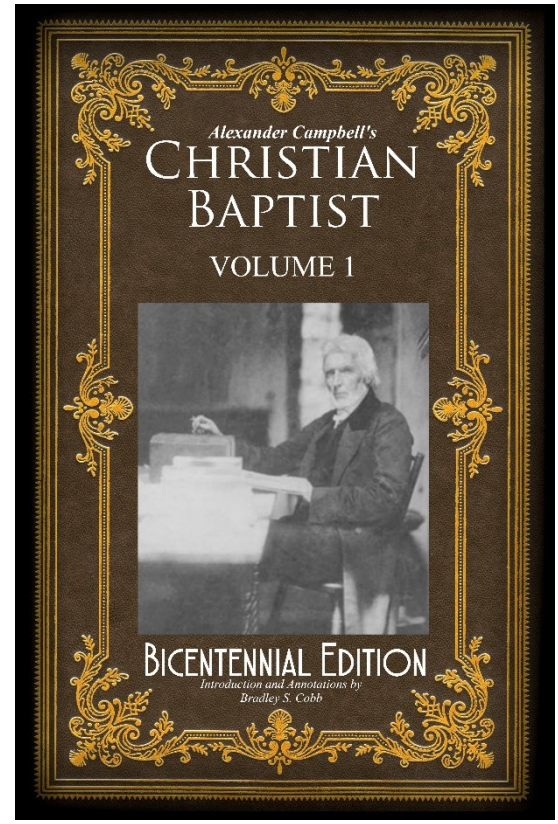

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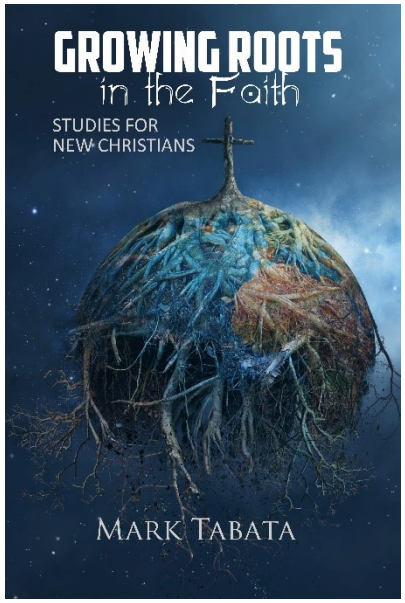
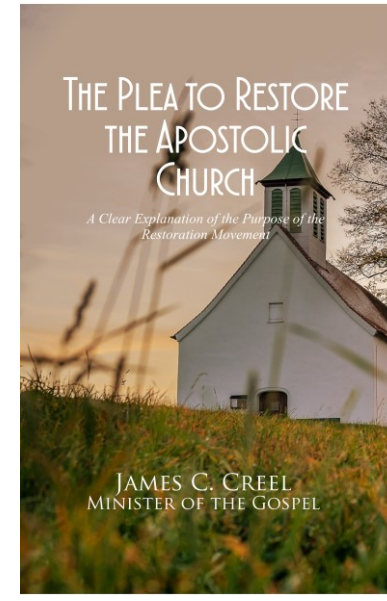


Growing Roots in the Faith (by Mark Tabata)**.** A textbook and a workbook to help new (or immature) Christians grow in faith and in maturity in Christ.

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

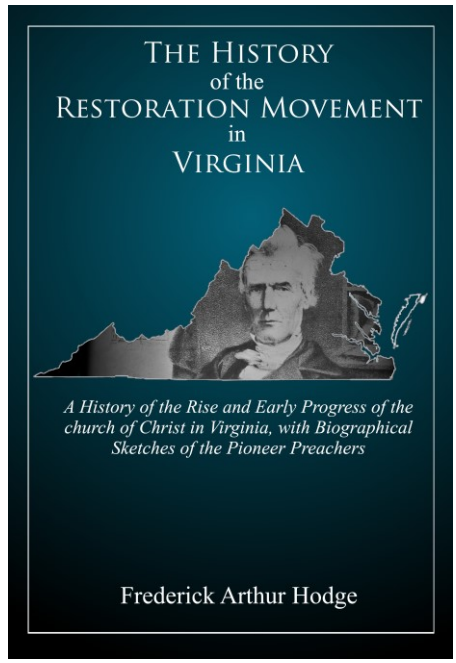


The Plea to Restore the Apostolic Church: A Clear Explanation of the Purpose of the Restoration Movement (by James C. Creel). The subtitle explains what this book is about pretty clearly. An easy read, designed to show how the Restoration plea looks *in practice*.

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

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

The History of the Restoration Movement in Virginia (by Frederick Arthur Hodge). Originally titled, "The Plea and the Pioneers in Virginia," this book details the work of Alexander Campbell, the impact of the *Christian Baptist* and *Millennial Harbinger*, and gives brief biographical sketches of several hard-working brethren who spread the gospel, not caring whether anyone remembered their names or not.



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Catholicism Against Itself (Volume 2).

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The Christian Messenger (volume 14) With this volume, the set will be complete!

And there will be many, many more!

QUOTES WORTH CONTEMPLATING

On the Danger of Speaking Out

It is a rarity, seldom to be witnessed, to see a person boldly opposing either the doctrinal errors or the unscriptural measures of a people with whom he has identified himself, and to whom he looks for approbation [approval] and support. If such a person appears in any party, he soon falls under the frowns of those who either think themselves wiser than the reprover, or would wish so to appear. Hence it usually happens that such a character must lay his hand upon his mouth, or embrace the privilege of walking out of doors.

Alexander Campbell
Christian Baptist Vol. 1.

On the Status of Denominations

First, the peace and union of a church of Christ are not the result of any sort of ecclesiastical government. Secondly, the increase of Christ's body is not predicated on anything so exceedingly exceptionable as modern confessions of faith; but on the confession of the first truth. Thirdly, the worshipping establishments now in operation throughout christendom, increased and cemented by their respective voluminous confessions of faith, and their ecclesiastical constitutions, are not churches of Jesus Christ, but the legitimate daughters of that Mother of Harlots, the Church of Rome.

Walter Scott (under the pen name "Phillip")
Christian Baptist Vol. 1.

On Dividing the Law of Moses

The scriptures never divide the law of Moses into moral, ceremonial, and judicial. This is the work of schoolmen, who have also divided the invisible world into heaven, hell, and purgatory; who have divided the obedience of Christ into active, passive, and both; who have divided the members of the church into speechless babes, seekers of religion, and regenerated saints; who have divided the kingdom of heaven, or Christian kingdom, into clergy, ruling elders, and laity; and who have philosophized, allegorized, and mysticised Christianity into an incomprehensible and ineffable jargon of christianized paganism and judaism.

Alexander Campbell
Christian Baptist Vol. 1.

On the word Ekklesia, translated "Church"

Ekklesia literally signifies an assembly called out from others, and is used among the Greeks, particularly the Athenians, for their popular assemblies summoned by their chief magistrate, and in which none but citizens had a right to sit. By inherent power it may be applied to any body of men called out and assembled in one place. If ever it loses the ideas of calling out and assembling, it loses its principal features, and its primitive use.

Alexander Carson
Reasons for Separating
from the General Synod of Ulster

On how Greece Helped Christianity Spread

Had it not been for [Alexander the Great's] interweaving of Greeks and Semites it would have been quite impossible for any enterprise to spread from Palestine to the west with such rapidity as characterized the Christian missionary accomplishments of the first century.

Benjamin Willard Robinson, Ph.D.
The Life of Paul (1956)

On the Importance of the Nature of Jesus

The just character of false and dangerous teachers, may be illustrated in a few particulars. The first is an antichrist, who denies the *divinity* of Christ. They are such as we term deists.

James O'Kelly
An Address to the Christian Church (1790)
Note: O'Kelly has been accused of denying the deity of Jesus. This quote should end the debate.

Summarizing Paul

A changed gospel is not a gospel at all!

Chuck Wyeth
By Every Word, Workbook (2021)

On the Importance of Jesus

"Thou shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins." In a sin-filled world, with man giving up his relationship with God because of sin; what could be more meaningful?

Bill Howard
God Is (2022)

On Using Bible Language

We hold truth in the words in which God gave it, prophets wrote it, Christ spoke it and the apostles taught it We will neither add to the words for popery, nor give them up for liberty. If the imperfect forms (of so-called truth) are taught in the Bible, it must be In Bible language. If that is the way God chose to teach them, that is the way we choose; if we can learn them in Bible language, we have no need of formulas. If we cannot, then we did not learn them in the Bible.

Rice Haggard
An Address … on the Sacred Import of the Name Christian (1804)

On Civil Government

1. How are the authorities that exist ordained of God?

The context shows that Paul has reference to the principles of government, no matter what the form may be. Government founded upon principles of right and eternal truth. If there were only one true form, we, as Christians, could live only under that form. We must conform ourselves to the principles of justice and equity no matter what the form of the government under which we live may be.

2. What is the limit of our obedience and subjection to the civil authorities? See Acts 5:28-29 and Daniel 6:7-10.

Wherever Civil Law conflicts with religious duties, the Christian ought to disobey it regardless of consequences. When the apostles were forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, they paid no heed to the prohibition but filled Jerusalem with the doctrine of Christ, and when they were brought before the authorities to give an account of such violation, "Peter, and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28-29). When there was established a royal statute under king Darius that for thirty days no one "shall ask a petition of any god or man" save of Darius; "and when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, (by the king) he went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem); and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime"—thus ignoring the decree of king Darius. His miraculous deliverance from the den of lions should encourage every Christian to ignore all laws that conflict with Divine Law.

3. How is the civil ruler a "minister of God to thee for good"?

Paul is not talking about men who pervert their offices, but those who enforce justice. If a ruler does not perform his duty he is disobeying civil authority and divine justice.

4. To what state of things do these instructions apply?

Wherever there is a settled form of Government. They would not apply in a state of revolution.

I.B. Grubbs
Commentary on Romans

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Jesus and the Prince of Edessa

Kyle D. Frank

We all recognize that the fame and wonder of Jesus Christ went forth throughout the known world of those days. From the mad attempt of King Herod to slay the infant King of the Jews up to and certainly beyond our days does His fame and reverence go.

In the 13th chapter of book One of the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius we find an absolutely amazing account of Jesus having communicated by a letter that was sent to Him in a situation that could be seen as a New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament story of Naaman the Leper. Also, during contemplation it became apparent to me that this could be one of those places spoken of by John the apostle: And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written (John 21:25). Jesus was a very busy, very fruitful worker in God's business.

This story begins during the earthly mission of Christ. He received a letter by a special messenger who had been appointed to see that the communication was carried out. The name of the prince of Edessa was Agbarus and he reigned over the nations beyond the Euphrates. He reigned with great glory according to Eusebius. But, like Naaman, had been wasted away by a disease, both dreadful and incurable by human means. We are told that Jesus was too busy to go Himself, but sent a message by one of His disciples. The healing occurred at that time.

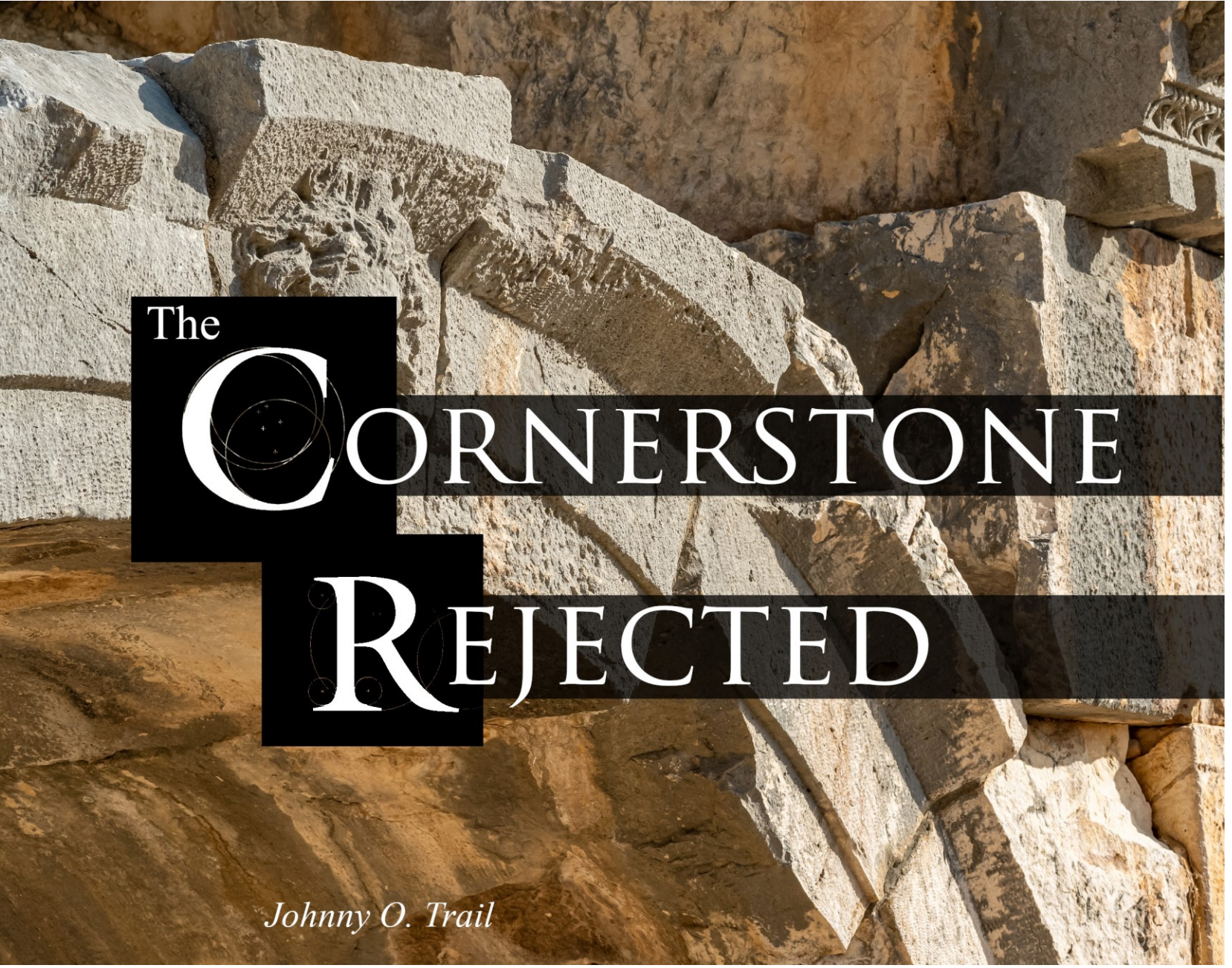
After His resurrection and ascension, "Thomas sent Thaddeus, who had been one of the seventy disciples, to Edessa as a herald and evangelist of the doctrines of Christ. And by his agency all the promises of our Savior were fulfilled." As an evidence to the trueness of this account, Eusebius gave the following:

From King Agbarus to Jesus, sent via Ananias, a Courier.

"Agbarus, prince of Edessa, sends greeting to Jesus the excellent Savior, who has appeared in the borders of Jerusalem. I have heard the reports respecting thee and thy cures, as performed by thee without medicines and without the use of herbs. For, as it is said, thou causest the blind to see again, the lame to walk, and thou cleanseth the lepers and thou casteth out impure spirits and demons, and thou healest those that are tormented by long disease, and thou raiseth the dead. And hearing all these things of thee, I concluded in my mind one of two things; either that thou art God, and having descended from heaven, doest these things, or else doing them, thou art the son of God. Therefore, I now have written and besought thee to visit me, and heal the disease with which I am afflicted. I have also heard that the Jews murmur against thee, and are plotting to injure thee; I have, however a very small but noble state, which is sufficient for us both."

The Answer of Jesus to King Agbarus by the Courier Ananias.

"Blessed art thou, O Agbarus, who, without seeing, hast believed in me. For it is written concerning me, that they who have seen me will not believe, that they who have not seen, may believe and live. But in regard to what thou hast written, that I should come unto thee, it is necessary that I should fulfill all things here, for which I have been sent. And after this fulfilment, thus to be received again by Him that sent me. And after I have been received up, I will send to thee a certain one of my disciples, that he may heal thy affliction, and give life to thee and to those who are with thee."



The Cornerstone Rejected

Johnny O. Trail

When Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, those celebrating Passover were quoting a messianic passage (Matthew 21:42) from Psalm 118. The passage as quoted from verse twenty-two says, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone." The event and Psalm are at once a prophecy of rejection and praise for the Messiah who would ride a donkey into the city just days before His crucifixion. The praise portion says, in Psalm 118:26, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD."

The ministry of Jesus is filled with irony. The passages regarding Christ as the chief cornerstone are found in various places in the Old and New Testament. Isaiah offers similar wording when he says in Isaiah 28:16, "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily.'" The word "Zion" refers to the city of Jerusalem where the ultimate rejection of Christ would happen. The chain of events recorded in Matthew 21 is a fulfillment of the prophecies recorded in Psalm 118 and Isaiah 28.

Christ's rejection was inhumanly cruel, but it figures into God's plan of redemption for lost humankind. The "chief cornerstone" phrase is used three times in the gospels (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17) and three times in other passages (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6, 7). At once, Jesus was loved and hated by people who followed Him during his earthly ministry. The same multitudes that followed Jesus (Matthew 15:30) were the same ones who later cried out for His murder (Matthew 27:20-23).

The main source of rejection would come from the religious officials of Jesus' age. Except for a few, they were staunchly opposed to Jesus as the Messiah. The Pharisees were arrogant in their assumptions about Christ's city of origin and their feelings regarding Jesus' identity. The Bible records, in John 7:48-52:

> *"'Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.' Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?' They answered and said to him, 'Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.'"*

The Bible makes several observations about this "chief cornerstone" that are worthy of consideration. This stone was to be laid in Zion (a.k.a. Jerusalem). 1 Peter 2:6 says, "Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a Chief Cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.'" Thus, it is not coincidental that Jesus was crucified in Zion to bring about the forgiveness of sins through contacting His blood at the point of baptism (Acts 22:16).

Next, the "chief cornerstone" was Jesus Christ. Once again, I Peter 2:6b says, "...He who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." This cornerstone was the crux of God's plan regarding the redemption of all humankind. Without His sacrifice, burial, and resurrection, there would be no hope for any person. The one who acts in simple trusting faith and obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9) to Him will never be put to shame by God. One might suffer shame from being ridiculed (Matthew 5:10-12), but that shame will be destroyed by the ultimate victory that is found in Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

Consequently, the "Chief Cornerstone" would be rejected. 1 Peter 2:7 says, "Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'the stone which the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone…'" This rejected stone would have incalculable value for Jews and Gentiles alike for the salvation of all souls. The Jews rejected Christ during His earthly ministry as evidenced by His crucifixion, but this rejection would endure with those who desire eternal life. For those who believe in Christ, He is the most important building block in God's plan of redemption and in the establishment of the church (Acts 20:28).

In these passages, Christ is described as a stone of offense. 1 Peter 2:8 says "'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed." The Jews were offended at One who was crucified on a Roman cross. The Greeks believed that a "god" should be one of notoriety, perhaps a great conqueror according to human standards. The Messiah was offensive because He did not fit *their idea* of what He should be! He is offensive to many people today for that very reason.

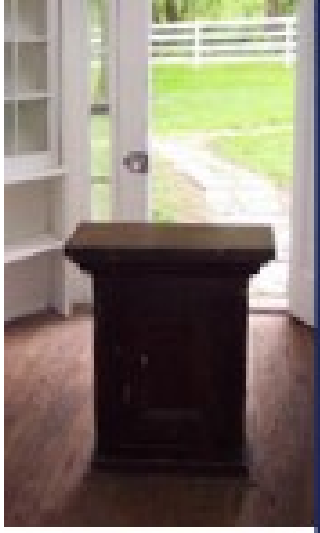
Paul addresses this very problem when he writes the first Corinthian letter which we have preserved for us today. He says, in 1 Corinthians 1:20-24:

"Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

It was through the proclamation of the gospel via human vessels that people were able to be saved (Romans 1:16). That gospel necessitated preaching the death of a loving Messiah—something inconsistent with certain Jew and Gentile reasoning.

Conversely, those accepting the rejected cornerstone have been made into a holy nation or people. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We are now a spiritual nation destined to show those in darkness the light of Jesus Christ and call the lost (by the proclamation of the word) into His kingdom.

Instead of being a stone of stumbling, Christ is a source of refuge and the foundation of eternal life. It is ironic to think that the same stone can mean totally different things to various people confronted with the gospel of Christ. Is He a stone of refuge or a stone of offense to you?



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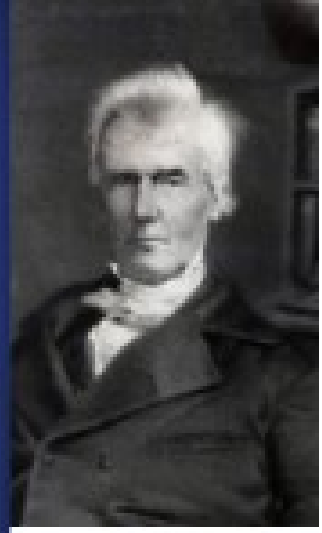

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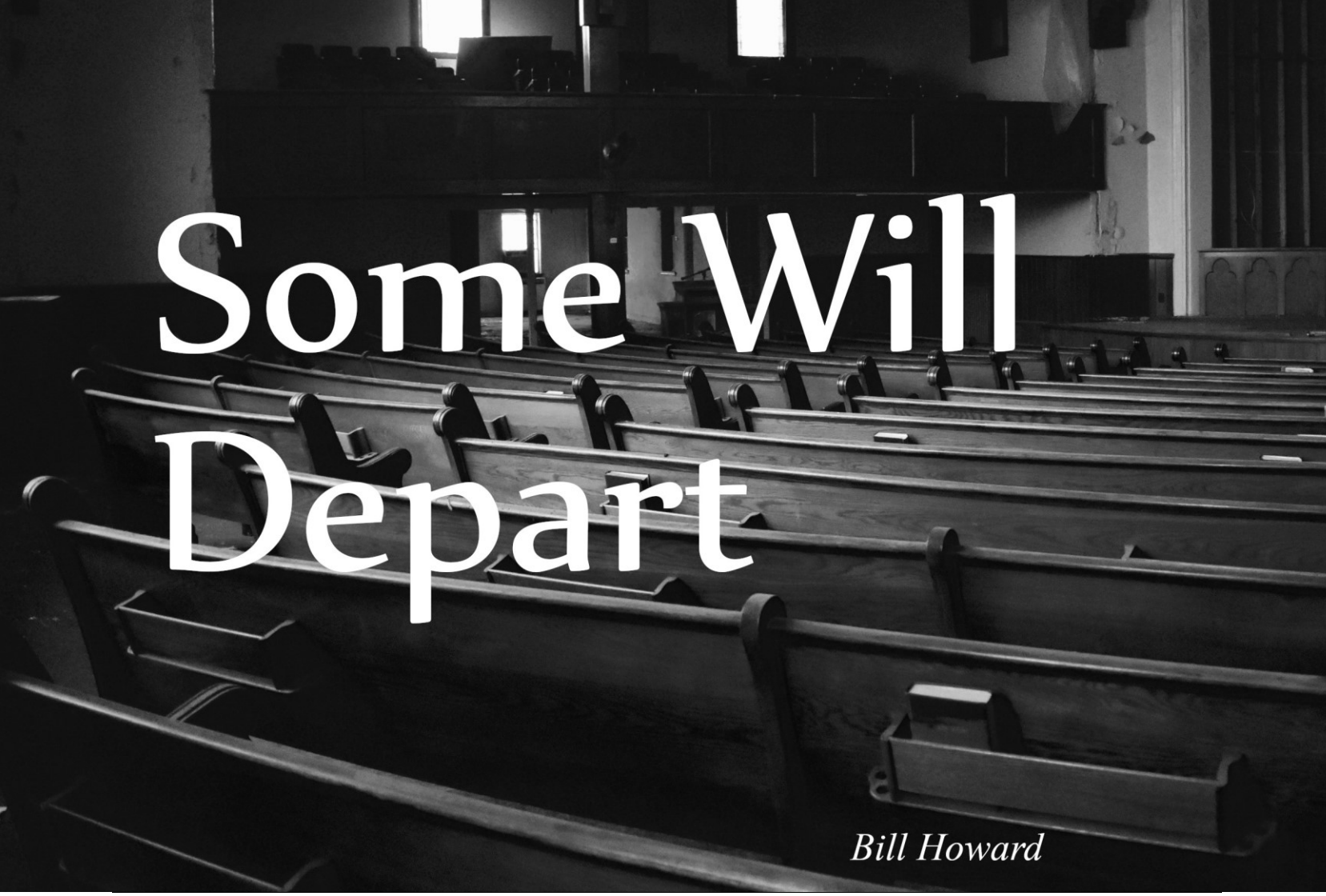

Some Will Depart

Bill Howard

> *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in their hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."*
>
> 1 Timothy 4:1-2

What was, and is, the literal meaning of such a statement? If one takes time to dwell on these words and their meaning, we recognize the significance of the implication imbedded in Paul's statement.

When the apostle Paul spoke, or wrote it was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit who guided his every word. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

There can be no question; these words about departures came from God. Departing from God is not a new thing either. From the beginning of creation, man has been notorious for his proclivity of disappointing God. Timothy was a young preacher who had previously worked with Paul. He had been left at Ephesus with a great burden to preach the gospel and to correct errors in the church. He was charged with heavy responsibility. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Timothy 5:21). No doubt Paul wanted him to know that he was fully aware of what was ahead for Timothy. He had suffered much for his preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Timothy would also.

It is obvious then that contained in the passage is a fact that it is a possibility for one to depart from the faith, the comfort, the assurance of heaven and become enmeshed in worldly pleasures and forsake our relationship with our God. Turning away from God and remaining in sin is a definite one-way ticket to eternal condemnation: Hell.

This writer cannot remember the last time the word hell was mentioned from the pulpit. Is it no longer a reality? Have we no need to respect the

truth? Are we beyond believing that some of God's creation will be condemned eternally? Satan does his best to convince people they need not fear. A gracious and loving God would not condemn anyone. Many organizations in the name of religion promote this idea; there is a heaven where everyone will go after physical death. What a wonderful thought: as nice as that would be, it is not so stated in the Holy Word of God. Disbelief in the teaching of the Bible has become more and more widespread, and far too often the truth pales into insignificance in the minds of many. We do things as we see fit; we have no problems with what God wants, so He will have no problem with what we want. In the veil of shadows created by man that obscures truth, people have been lead away from God. We must believe that the truth of God's teaching has never changed. There is heaven and hell and anything we believe contrariwise is incorrect.

The first thought we must consider are the words of Jesus: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me" (John 14:6). Was that statement made just to be joshing? Was it a joke to send people on a fool's errand? Absolutely not! Jesus never uttered anything but truth from the Holy Spirit. When one departs, then, he is departing from Jesus and His way of salvation. There is no alternative way.

When Paul was writing this letter to Timothy, he was concerned with nothing other than saving the souls of his fellowman. The church was young, most likely about thirty years old. There were dangers involved, false teachers even then attempting to lead others away from God. And in many cases, they were successful, but there was, and is, only one institution wherein one could be safe with Jesus. That is His Body, His Church. Paul told the Ephesians that God "had put all things under His [Jesus] feet and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Latter times refers to any period from when Paul wrote it to the present. Ignoring truth was prevalent then; it is prevalent today. So, we will sum all this up very simply. Jesus is the only way to God; if we remain faithful to Him, we will be rewarded. Depart from Him, we give up salvation.

The author of the Hebrew letter wrote:

> *"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."*
>
> Hebrews 10:26-27

That is true. If we choose to give our lives over to sin and remain in that condition, we have departed. Earlier he had written:

> *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucified to themselves the son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."*
>
> Hebrews 6:4-6

He also states that those who choose to remain in sin are trodding underfoot the Son of God (10:29). The key thought here is choosing to remain in that condition. Failing to choose, we suffer eternal condemnation. "Now, the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38). The worst possible result for one who was once a child of God. If it is not possible that a child of God could depart the faith, there would have never been this warning. Peter wrote:

> *"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."*
>
> 2 Peter 2:20-21

These words are truth from the Holy Spirit inspired word of God. We must accept this and live our life accordingly.

Living in sin separates us from God, of this there is no doubt. However, for the child of God who sins there is still hope. Remember that God does not wish that any of His creation should perish, but that each and every one would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Paul said that all have sinned and come

short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). He also warned: "let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). As human beings, we tend to sin, but sin is not a necessity; it is not a requirement. Paul told the Corinthians:

> *"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful, he will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure."*
>
> 1 Corinthians 10:13, NLT

What a wonderful blessing this is from God! He provides the safeguard, the power to resist sin. God's power is the only power stronger than the robust drawing power of Satan, and He is on our side. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

This is our escape from sin. John wrote to Christians:

> *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."*
>
> 1 John 2:1-2

He also stated:

> *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
>
> 1 John 1:8-9

> *"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."*
>
> 1 John 1:7b

Because of God's love and His grace, it is not necessary for one to remain in sin. He has provided the way out.

There are other ways that one can depart that are equally detrimental. The rich ruler in Luke chapter 18 wanted to know what to do to be saved. When Christ answered him, he was sorrowful, he didn't wish to comply with the requirements. In Paul's trial before Felix, the merciless Procurator of Judea, Paul defended his faith in Christ and reasoned with him of judgment to come. Felix trembled, and answered, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Easier to ignore than accept truth from the great teacher. Paul speaking to Agrippa about Christ and His resurrection, Agrippa said to him, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Convenient seasons and almosts are of no avail. As far as we know, both died in their sins, separated from God. They departed, not God.

One more consideration before we bring this to a close. We quoted the words of Jesus earlier: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father but by me." He also stated: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Again the words of Christ: "Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

> *"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity."*
>
> Matthew 7:22-23

The cruelest words of judgment one will ever hear. Our Lord casting us aside, we, His children, were not fit to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It couldn't be sadder. We had every opportunity to prepare for judgment; we failed.

Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

BUT AS FOR ME...

Adam Cozort

"Hey, come with us! It will be fun!"

For as much as we celebrate our individuality, it is amazing how often humanity makes decisions based upon what others are doing. Trends, fads, and groupthink are always pushing us to go a certain direction and follow the crowd. It is undeniably easy to get caught up in watching what everyone else is doing and saying. Then it becomes a mental battle of what is more important, who I am or who everyone else wants me to be.

In Psalm 5, David writes about the importance of God's expectations and guidance. He talks about how God does not take pleasure in the wicked and will destroy those who speak falsehood. Then he says, "but as for me" (5:7). This is an important phrase of contrast and refusal. It is the admission that the psalmist is unwilling to follow the path of the wicked around him, but instead he is set on coming into the house of God and worshiping Him (5:7-8).

A similar statement is made in another famous passage of Scripture. Toward the end of the life of Joshua, he is giving his people a speech about their covenant with God. Near the end of that speech, he tells the people, "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

The statement in each of the aforementioned verses is a message of conviction. It admits there is a choice to be made, but it also establishes that the speaker has settled on his response regardless of what others do.

There will be many occasions in life when we must have convictions that include this little phrase. We live in a world where Jesus says the majority are on a road that leads to destruction (Mathew 7:13-14). Christians will face the necessity of this statement when facing family, friends, co-workers, and others with the choices of this world. Peter discusses how the world thinks it strange when we no longer run with them in the same choices of lifestyle, speaking evil of us (1 Peter 4:4).

Likewise, the individual in the world must make the same choice in the use of this phrase. Will the road everyone else remains upon be continued, or will another direction be chosen?

We live in a world that wants everyone to be an individual, as long as they speak, think, and act the same way. The Christian does not follow that standard when it comes to the choices and lifestyles of the surrounding world. Instead, while acknowledging the calls of the world around us, be strong enough to answer, "but as for me."

Scan the QR code to see a video where Adam goes more into detail on Psalm 5.

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THE Chronological LIFE OF CHRIST

PART FOUR: Why Don't the Genealogies Match? (part 2)

Bradley S. Cobb

The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is easy to understand: he showed Jesus is the *legal* heir to the throne of David, and the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[13] The purpose of Luke's, however, is not as cut-and-dried.

Oh, and it is *way different* from Matthew's.

To put Luke's genealogy in perspective, let's consider the opening to his gospel account.

Luke's Introduction (Luke 1:1-4)

> *Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.*

Whatever we decide about Luke's genealogy, it must fit into this opening statement. Luke didn't just make up names. His list was the result of *careful investigation*. Luke did his research, and expected everything he wrote to stand up to the test of careful historical examination.

An atheist named William Ramsay hated the Bible so much he determined to prove it untrustworthy. He used Luke's writings (the books of Luke and Acts) and went around to the areas mentioned. He involved himself in archaeological studies and historical records. And by the time he was finished, he declared, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense … in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians."[14] He proceeded to write several books defending the accuracy of the Bible.

All that to say, Luke would not have put these specific names in this specific order unless he was absolutely certain of their accuracy. So why doesn't his list jive with Matthew's? We're going to first consider the difficulties, as well as proposed solutions to these two inspired lists.

Difficulties

We can't call ourselves dedicated Bible students if we aren't willing to take a look at difficult parts of God's word. And of all the passages that people use as supposed "contradictions," these two genealogies pose one of the most challenging to explain.

Difficulty #1: Sure Looks Like Joseph's Genealogy

If we didn't have Matthew's gospel, then any reader of Luke would naturally assume (and with

[13] See previous lesson for far more detail.

[14] The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, 1915

good reason) that this genealogy traces Jesus' lineage through his foster-father, Joseph. Mary isn't even named in this list. Look at Luke 3:23-24:

> *Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years old, being (as it was supposed) the son of Joseph, who was the son of Heli, who was the son of Matthat…*

And if this is the case, then either Matthew or Luke (or both) were just dead wrong on their lists.

Difficulty #2: Jesus Isn't Heir to the Throne

If this is the legitimate genealogy through Joseph (see #1), then Jesus isn't in line for the kingdom, as that right is passed from father to son. This genealogy goes back to David, but through his son *Nathan* (Luke 3:31), who did not inherit the throne, nor did his descendants. This poses a rather significant theological issue.

Difficulty #3: What Was Your Dad's Name?

If we take Luke's genealogy straightforward as written, then Joseph was the son of Heli (Luke 3:23). But Matthew says his father's name was Jacob (Matthew 1:16). I know that sometimes people have multiple names in the Bible (Moses' father-in-law had three different names),[15] but *there is not a single name that matches* in the two genealogies between Joseph and Zerubbabel. I personally find it difficult to believe that Matthew and Luke listed the same people (or even just some of the same people), but never once used the same name for them.

Difficulty #4: Luke's Big Fail on Showing Jesus Representing All Mankind

One of the main purposes behind Luke's genealogy seems to be to show that Jesus is the Savior for all mankind, because He—like everyone else—is part of humanity through Adam. But since Luke appears to trace Jesus' lineage through Joseph (who was *not* His father), then all Luke can prove is that Jesus was raised by a man who descended from Adam. That raising doesn't give Jesus His humanity.

Difficulty #5: Shealtiel's Two Dads

Matthew says Shealtiel's dad was Jechoniah (1:12). Luke says his dad was Neri (3:27). And no, these aren't two names for the same person. None of Luke's line from Shealtiel to David Matches with Matthew's record of the same gap.

Difficulty #6: The Missing People

Between David and Zerubbabel, Matthew skipped a couple names here and there. But after Zerubbabel, things seem to get crazy. Where Matthew has nine names between Zerubbabel and Joseph, Luke has seventeen—nearly *double*! Was Matthew just lazy?

I'm sure there are probably more difficulties I am missing, but those are the ones that came to mind as I put this together.

Proposed Solutions to the Genealogical Conundrum

Throughout the centuries, Bible students, commentators, scholars, experts (and whoever else you want to throw in there) have attempted to find ways of harmonizing these two lists. And none of them are without their own difficulties. But we will present some of the more prominent ones here:

Possible Solution #1:
The Royal and Priestly Line of Joseph

Ambrose, among others, posited that Jesus was descended from the Kingly line of Solomon (Matthew's list) and from the priestly line of Nathan (Luke's list). It is argued that this was necessary because Jesus is both king and priest.[16]

While this sounds interesting from a "let's make a theological point here" standpoint, this solution fails due to the fact that Nathan—the son of David—wasn't a priest. He *couldn't* be a priest, since his father was David, of the tribe of *Judah*. That would make Nathan from *Judah* as well. And the only priests came from the tribe of *Levi*.

Possible Solution #2:
Joseph and Shealtiel were Adopted

It has been suggested that an adoption or two could explain all the variances between the two lists. If Joseph was the *natural* son of Eli (*Heli* in some translations), but the *adopted* son of Jacob, then we have an explanation for the two different lists. The same thing would have to be true for Shealtiel: born to Neri, but adopted by Jeconiah.

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[15] He was called Reuel (Exodus 2:18), Jerthro (Exodus 18:12), and Hobab (Judges 4:11).

[16] Just, Arthur Jr., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Luke* (Thomas C. Oden, editor). E-Sword edition.

There are biblical instances of being called "the son of" when it wasn't talking about a natural parent. In the Jewish way of thinking (and to a large part it is true of us today), "[He] that brings up, not he that begets, is called the father" or parent.[17] Moses was called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.[18] Jesus was called the son of Joseph.[19] Joseph was called Pharaoh's father.[20]

Matthew literally uses the word "begat" (KJV) or "fathered" (SENT),[21] which implies natural fatherhood, Luke says, "was of" for each layer of his genealogy (most translators expand it to "was the son of," but the Greek just reads "was of"). While this may not seem like a big difference, Luke's wording opens the possibility of an *adopted* son, or another option which we will note momentarily.

But there are problems with this one too.

- One of the goals of Luke's gospel, and thus the genealogy, is to show Jesus' humanity, that He is not just *Son of God*, but also *Son of man*. Showing He was raised by a human who was descended from Adam doesn't show Jesus' relationship to the human race.
- Jeconiah was 8 years old when he became king, reigned barely over three months, and was taken captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:9-10). He remained a captive until he was 45 years old, when the king of Babylon elevated him to eat with him (2 Kings 25:27-30). In other words, adoption doesn't really seem like something he would have had the opportunity to engage in.

Possible Solution #3:
This is the Genealogy through Mary

While this has its difficulties (specifically Difficulty #1 above), it is the one which answers most of the difficulties, when certain reasonable explanations are given. We will explain how this could be Mary's family line after showing how this concept deals with the previously mentioned difficulties.

1. If this is Mary's, then it isn't Joseph's, and thus all differences between the two lists are rendered moot (at least from Zerubbabel to Joseph).
2. If this is Mary's, then it has no bearing on the *legal*, royal line, because that goes through the legal father (Joseph). Thus, this difficulty is overcome.
3. See #1 in this list.
4. If this is Mary's, then it shows the *physical* line from which Jesus came, showing His relationship to the entire human race by tracing Him back to Adam. Thus, difficulty overcome
5. We will deal with this difficulty momentarily.
6. If this is Mary's, then the difference in number of people between Joseph and Zerubbabel can rationally be explained (and it may be that Matthew skipped some generations in that section as well, which would also explain part of the difference).

So now, all we really have to do is figure out how this list could possibly refer to Mary's lineage instead of Joseph's. There are two main ways I've seen this tried—one of which seems a stretch, the other not as much. But both of them assume (and there is ancient evidence for it)[22] that Heli/Eli (depending on your translation) is Mary's father.

The first attempt is a rearranging of the parentheses in Luke 3:23. Before we get into this, know that the parentheses are added by translators, as there was no such thing in Greek. So their placement is a matter of context and opinion. Luke 3:23, in most translations, reads: "Jesus… being (as was supposed) the Son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." Instead, it is suggested that it *should* read: "Jesus… (being as was supposed the Son of Joseph), which was of Heli." You might say this increases the confusion, calling Jesus "of Heli" or "the *Son of* Heli." But since Luke doesn't mention any women in his genealogy, it wouldn't be unthinkable for him

[17] John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible* on Luke 3:23. E-Sword edition.

[18] Exodus 2:10; Acts 7:21

[19] Luke 2:48; John 6:42.

[20] Genesis 45:8.

[21] The Spoken English New Testament.

[22] See John Gill's *Exposition* on this verse for more information.

to connect Jesus and His maternal grandfather this way.[23]

The problem with this is that Luke is extremely detailed and accurate, and doesn't appear to skip even a single generation. So while it isn't outside the realm of possibility, it doesn't seem likely he would skip a generation (Mary) at the beginning, while mentioning the adoptive father. Additionally, pretty much every professional translator agrees (check all the translations you like) that the parentheses are already in the right place, and don't need to be changed to make it easier to prove a point.

The second attempt takes part of the Old Testament law and applies it to the genealogy. When the Israelites were traveling toward the Promised Land, a group of sisters came to Moses with a problem—their father had no sons, only daughters. What would happen to his inheritance? Moses went to God, who said in these cases, the inheritance would pass to the daughters.[24] These same sisters came back with another question—what happens if they get married to someone outside their tribe? God's answer was for them to marry whoever they wanted, but only within their tribe, because the inheritance that had come to the daughter would become also the inheritance of her husband.[25]

How does this apply to the genealogy? This law, when figuring the inheritance, counts the *son-in-law* as a son. That is why it is called a son *in law*. Thus, when a man had only daughters, the genealogy would give his son-in-law as his son, which wouldn't mess up the later lines, because any children born to that union would still be physical descendants.

So, take all that information, then assume Heli was the father of Mary, but he had no sons, only daughters (a legitimate possibility). After his marriage to Mary, Joseph, now Heli's son-in-law, would be counted as his son.[26]

So when Luke says, "Joseph, which was the son of Heli," he's saying Joseph was the son *in law* of Heli.

It is suggested that this is also the situation Shealtiel was in, being the son-in-law of Neri, who (according to this understanding) had no sons. Thus, Shealtiel would have been counted as his son in this genealogy.

I get that this isn't the easiest, most cut-and-dried explanation we could want, but it is reasonable, fits with Jewish practice and custom of the time, and does away with all the difficulties between Matthew and Luke's accounts. Because of this, even though it takes some thinking to get there, I am satisfied that this is the best explanation for the differences between the two genealogies.

Luke's Purposes for His Genealogy

We already mentioned above that one of Luke's purposes seems to be to show the *humanity* of Jesus—that is, Jesus was a human, born from a human, descended from Adam like every other human. In other words, Jesus is one of us. This makes Jesus *relatable*. He had to grow, to learn, to suffer, to eat, to sleep just like the rest of us.

Another purpose may have been to explain to the Greeks (who had myriads of theories and traditions about where man came from) the origin of mankind. He traces Jesus back to the beginning of humanity (Adam), and then says Adam was "of God," meaning God was his source.

Both these two reasons help explain why Luke ran his genealogy backwards from Jesus to Adam instead of forward like Matthew did.

Luke may have also intended by this to show Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Zerubbabel. Whether he intended it or not, it does have that effect.

The Genealogy of Luke

Outside of Joseph, all the names between him and Zerubbabel are people only mentioned here. We know nothing about anyone on this portion of the list except that they are descended from Zerubbabel, and are in the ancestry of Jesus.

Since we discussed Zerubbabel (whose name literally means "Born in Babel [Babylon]") and Shealtiel in the previous article, we won't go into them here.

From Shealtiel, we encounter another list of people whose names only appear here. In other words,

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[23] McGarvey, J.W., and Pendleton, Philip Y., *The Fourfold Gospel* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1914) page 7.

[24] Numbers 27:1-11.

[25] Numbers 36.

[26] McGarvey and Pendleton, *Fourfold Gospel*, page 7.

we know nothing about any of these men from Neri (verse 27) to Mattatha (verse 31), except that they are in this genealogy.

Nathan

Nathan (father of Mattatha) was a son of David and Bathsheba, and was born in Jerusalem.[27] He almost certainly was named after Nathan the prophet, a friend of David who called out David's horrid sinfulness to his face.

David through Abraham

We covered these men in the previous lesson.

Terah

Abraham's father Terah traveled with him when they left Ur of the Chaldees, and died in Haran, a city Terah may have named after his own dead son.[28]

Nahor, Sereg, Reu

Outside of their appearance in genealogical records, nothing is known about these men.

Peleg

I would have included Peleg's name in the previous list, except that in Genesis 10:25, we are told he was called Peleg, "for in his days the earth was divided." What exactly that means isn't clear. It could mean his father was involved in some dividing up of land (the word "land" and the word "earth" are the same word in Hebrew). It could mean the family divided into different parts of the earth at the time Peleg was born. Or it could mean the earth was a giant land mass (frequently referred to in later literature as *Pangea*) that God divided into continents around this time.[29]

Heber

Heber was the well-known head of the family, which gave rise to his descendants being called *Hebrews*. The first person called a *Hebrew* is Abram (who God later renamed Abraham).[30] When Moses went to Egypt to free the Israelites, he went proclaiming "the LORD God of the Hebrews" had sent him.[31] In fact, the Israelites aren't called Israelites until Exodus 9:7—before that they are called *Hebrews*.

Outside of his appearance in genealogies, we know nothing about him, but he must have been of some importance to have people generations down the line still being called by his name.

Shelah, Cainan, Arphaxad

Like so many others in Luke's list, nothing is known about these men outside of genealogical facts. But God used them.

Shem

Possibly the oldest of Noah's three sons, Shem was given the blessing by his father. It is from Shem that we get the word Semitic, which can be used to describe a wide variety of languages, but when applied to people (at least in modern times) it only refers to Jews.

Noah

In a time of rampant sinfulness, where "every imagination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only on evil continually,"[32] Noah stood out like a bright light. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD."[33] By faith, Noah built an ark at the command of God, to keep them safe from the rain and floods that would come. This is even more impressive when you consider *it had never rained before*. So Noah was building an ark, preparing for something that no one had seen or heard of before. Imagine the heckling he would have gotten from those he warned: *Water from the sky? Noah have you lost your mind? You're nuts!* But Noah kept working and working for over 100 years, staying faithful to God throughout it all.

Lamech

Outside of his appearance in genealogies, nothing is known of Lamech.

Methuselah

His name literally means, "When he goes, it comes." Methuselah lived longer than anyone in recorded history at 969 years. And his name seems to be prophetic—because he died the same year the flood came.

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[27] 1 Chronicles 3:5.

[28] Genesis 11:31-32.

[29] While I like this option best for the coolness factor, I tend to think if the Pangea hypothesis is real, it would have happened during the flood.

[30] Genesis 14:13.

[31] Exodus 3:18; 9:1.

[32] Genesis 6:5

[33] Genesis 6:8.

Enoch

This man "walked with God." God thought it was so important that He had Moses record that fact twice in three verses.[34] Genesis 5:22 seems to indicate he began walking with God *after* Methuselah was born. And since Methuselah's name appears to foretell the flood, it may be that Enoch started taking God seriously at that point.

Enoch is called a prophet of God. He prophesied the flood (through Methuselah's name), and another of his prophesies was quoted by Jude to apply to false teachers in the first century.[35]

Enoch is in rare company, being one of only four *righteous* people in the entire Bible whose earthly end was orchestrated and carried out by God. The other three are Moses,[36] Elijah,[37] and Jesus.[38]

Jared, Mahalaleel, Cainan, Enosh

Jared is the second-oldest person in recorded history. But other than their ages at death and their places in the genealogy, nothing is known of these men. It may be assumed that these men were righteous. It is from this family that men were born who are called "sons of God." Unfortunately, most of these offspring married unfaithful spouses, "daughters of men," and went badly astray.[39]

Seth

Seth is the third son that we know about from Adam and Eve. He certainly wasn't their third child. Adam and Eve were commanded to "be fruitful and multiply." Seth wasn't born until at least nine months after Cain killed Abel. How old was Cain when that happened? Most seem to guess at least twenty years old. So were Adam and Eve "fruitful" and "multiplying" if they only had two children, waited twenty years, and then had a third?[40]

It was after Seth fathered Enos that "men began to call upon the name of the LORD." Seth and his descendants appear to have dedicated themselves to following God.

Adam

Adam was the first sinless man, who then became the first sinner. Eve was deceived by the serpent, but Adam was there with her and said nothing. Instead, he joined in. When God came to Adam (who was the head of the family), asking what was going on, Adam threw Eve under the proverbial bus. But Paul makes it quite clear that Adam is the one to blame.[41]

There is actually surprisingly little good said about Adam in the Bible. He was the first human, created in the image of God. He worked the ground. He named Eve and he named the animals. And he had children with his wife. That pretty much summarizes the non-bad things (which are: knowingly disobeying a direct command of God, hiding from God, lying to God, blaming Eve, blaming God).

God

We can't miss the fact that Luke traces all of humanity back to God. It was God's plan to create man. It was God who formed Adam and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. It was God who created a garden paradise for Adam and Eve to live in. It was God's plan to save mankind from their sin by sending His Son to be a perfect example, a perfect teacher, and a perfect sacrifice for them and us. He put that plan into motion by creating Adam.

When we look at the genealogies, we often get lost in the names and *human-ness* of the list, and sometimes we forget that *God* is the one behind it all. Luke reminds us not to forget where we came from. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

What Does This Mean for Us Today?

Behind it all, there is God. The bookends of Luke's genealogy are Jesus and the Father, God. How are you doing at remembering God in your

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[34] Genesis 5:22-24.

[35] Jude 14-16.

[36] Deuteronomy 34:5-7.

[37] 2 Kings 2:1-11.

[38] John 3:16; Acts 2:22-24.

[39] Genesis 6:1-3. The idea that "sons of God" in this passage refers to angels who fell is highly imaginative fiction which, unfortunately, has been allowed to be believed as truth. Jesus said angels neither marry nor are given in marriage (Mark 12:15). They are sexless beings. After describing the "sons of God" marrying the "daughters of men," we are given God's thoughts: "My spirit shall not always strive ***with man***…" (Genesis 6:3). The sinners of verse 2 are humans, otherwise God is confused about who He is talking about.

[40] This doesn't even get into the fact that Cain had to get a wife from somewhere—it was either his sister or a niece.

[41] 1 Corinthians 15:21-22; Romans 5:12-14.

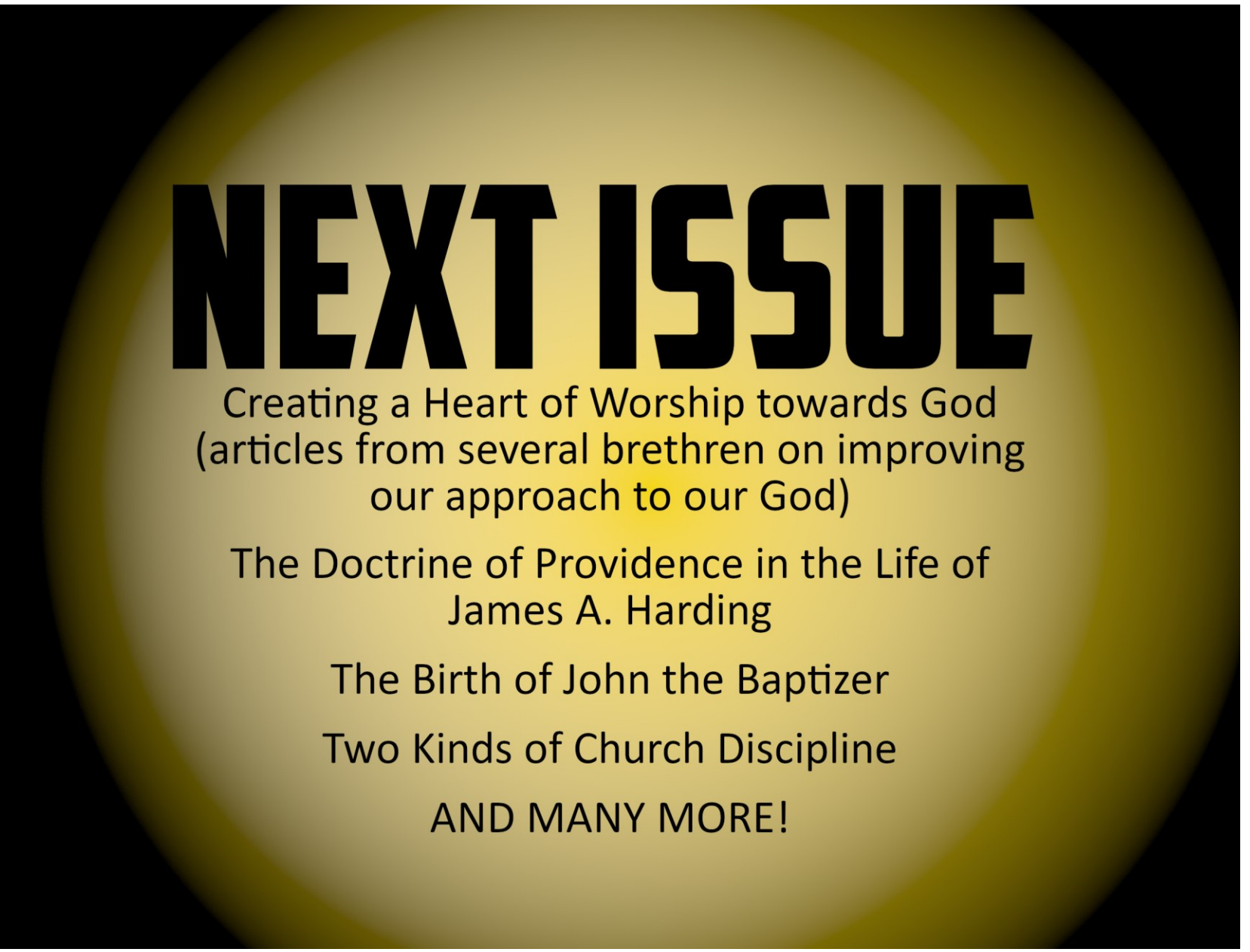
life? Do you pray enough? Do you thank Him enough? Do you read His word enough?

Jesus knows what it is like to suffer, to face temptation, to be tired, to be hungry, to be betrayed. And because of these things, He is able to identify with us, to help us.

> *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).*

Difficulties in the Bible can be figured out, or at least given a reasonable explanation if we are willing to dig a little and think a little. The world is quick to label anything a bit different in the Bible as a contradiction, but all of them have rational, reasonable explanations if we are willing to look for them.

We can't back away from difficulties. We should be willing, as Christians who trust in God and His word, to admit difficulties and try to find reasonable answers.



The Fascination with the 'Lost' Books of the Bible

Dewayne Bryant

Westerners have a strange fascination with extrabiblical texts, especially those billed as "lost" or "hidden." Interest in the Bible is always significant, but any mention of a new, forgotten, or lost Christian text will generate instant interest. News articles are standard fare, but the most exciting items will receive attention in documentaries and might even make their way into movies. There is one rule for the popularity of these works: the stranger the text, the more attention it demands.

Recent books have capitalized on America's attraction to obscure productions from the ancient world. A small sample of noteworthy publications includes titles such as *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It Into the New Testament*; *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*; *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*; *Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Christian Writings*. A quick search on Amazon should reveal at least a dozen books with the words 'lost' or 'forgotten' in the title.

Writers entice their audiences with the prospect that scholarship has discovered previously unknown compositions from antiquity. What generates such profound interest in the so-called 'lost' books of the Bible?

The Allure of Conspiracy Theories

Human beings are drawn to the fantastic. Sensational explanations will almost always find a ready audience more quickly than the truth (which is typically quite dull in comparison). Conspiracy theories stoke readers' imaginations of treasure hunts, lost lore, and forbidden truths. People love the idea that what they have always known was nothing more than a cover-up. They sit in rapt attention, listening to sensational stories about intrepid investigators who uncovered the facts; the more lurid, the better. The thrill of adventure and the appeal of hidden knowledge can be powerful.

One of the most popular approaches is also one of the most easily explained. People like conspiracy theories, the root of which is distrust—especially of religious authorities and institutions. The suppression of ancient texts goes hand-in-hand with beliefs about the 'lost' books of the Bible. For some, the Roman Catholic Church bears responsibility for hiding these texts. For others, it was religious authorities that would come to comprise the institutional church that wielded enough power to squelch dissenters and heretics. Whatever the case may be, Westerners love the idea of exposing the church's dirty secrets.

The quest to uncover the so-called "truth" is something we admire. We celebrate whistle-blowers whose work exposes fraud and deception. We admire brave reporters who go against the grain, even if it should put them at personal risk. Similarly, academics have a righteous cause in freeing others from religious oppression.

Discovering new texts becomes an act of liberation. Rather than the institutional church continuing to control the lives of the religious with books that were (allegedly) carefully curated many centuries ago and have been used as tools of oppression, scholars can now free people to believe what they want. One gospel reveals Mary Magdalene as Jesus' wife and equal? Down with the patriarchy. Another text expands the sexual mores of believers and removes the Bible's puritanical restrictions? A step forward for modern sexual proclivities. The popularity of these texts lies in the fact that nearly anything a person *wants* to believe can be found in these texts.

The Quest for Pluralism

Conspiracy theories are always popular, but the issue of the 'lost' books of the Bible brings up a second challenge facing the church: pluralism. This is one of the basic tenets of modern American culture. Many folks don't want anyone to feel badly about themselves, especially when "thou shalt not judge"

is modern society's first and greatest command. We like having options, and pluralism satisfies our yearning for that desire.

Religious perspectives are some of the most personal beliefs one can hold. This involves a kind of ownership. Not everyone sees Jesus the same way, so pluralism gives people a kind of shield to defend the right to hold their personal beliefs, even if they are not popular or do not agree with the Bible. The 'lost books of the Bible' are attractive because they seemingly legitimize diverse viewpoints. Not all ancient writers understood Jesus the same way. Some were close enough to the biblical portrait of Christ, but others diverge wildly from the New Testament texts. If the ancients could have different views of Jesus, the argument goes, then we can too.

The idea that no official version of the Christian faith existed in the ancient world goes back more than a century in European biblical scholarship. According to this viewpoint, a unified church with consistent doctrine is little more than a popular fiction; in reality, many different Christianities existed, all of which could stake a claim to authenticity. Further, not all of them used the same texts. For some, Jesus was a Jewish messiah. For others, he was a Jewish apocalyptic prophet. For still others, he was a Gnostic teacher of righteousness. Each had different texts presenting alternative views of what Jesus said and did. And if the early church had such a bewildering variety of viewpoints on Jesus, then modern believers should also have the option of choosing their own perspective.

Updating the Gospel

Some modern scholars look at the various presentations of Jesus with an eye toward challenging the church's historical stance on certain doctrines, especially those with significant influence today. For instance, When Karen King of Harvard University unveiled the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* (GJW), news outlets frantically published stories about the religious implications of this credit-card-sized fragment. If Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife, and her portrayal contradicted traditional views about her and women in general, then this could be used as a tool to undermine centuries of religious patriarchy. Gone would be any restrictions for a male-only clergy, along with the authority of New Testament passages about the submission of wives to their husbands and the silencing of female voices in worship (better: the pulpit). Thankfully, this fragment was later proved a forgery.

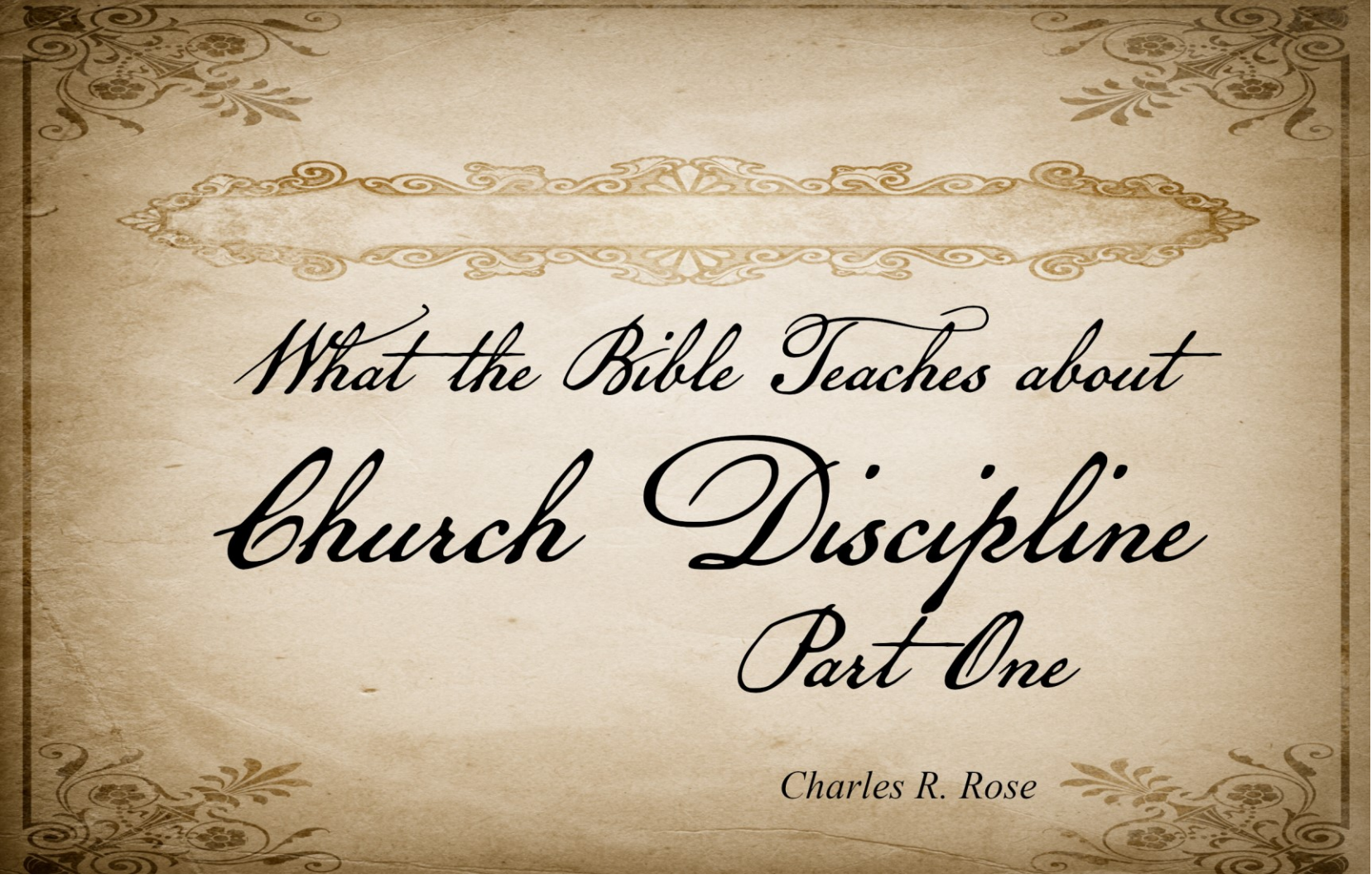
The interest in updating the gospel is natural. Religion has always been seen as malleable, and Christianity is no exception. Critical scholarship paints the first few centuries of the church as a time of great diversity in which no one group had a monopoly on the truth. According to many, even the New Testament has many different voices, some of which contradict the others. Finding extra-biblical texts that can be used to promote modern cultural developments will always find a ready home.

Conclusion

The existence of 'lost books' of the Bible has always held a particular allure in the Western world. This interest is not new—it has historical roots stretching back centuries. Texts either left out of the canonical scriptures or lost over time have captivated the imagination of believers, skeptics, scholars, and the general public alike.

There are many reasons why someone might want to study extra-biblical literature. It could be for the sake of historical interest, to get a glimpse into the beliefs of early Jewish and Christian communities during the early centuries of the church's existence. Others, dissatisfied with the Bible, might search other texts for a newer, more refreshing perspective. Critics will scour these texts for evidence that will supposedly challenge the Bible's authority.

There is nothing wrong with studying extra-biblical texts. They are often quite interesting, even entertaining. Stories about Jesus taming dragons as a child or performing weird miracles may elicit a chuckle from modern readers used to the sober manner in which biblical miracles are recorded. Less humorous are extra-biblical stories of Jesus killing his teacher, crippling his classmates, or terrorizing local children by turning them into animals. The goal of studying these texts is to understand the rich diversity of beliefs in the time of the early church, but an equally important goal is to highlight the vivid contrast between the non-canonical books and those of the New Testament, which are much more realistic and historically accurate.



I must begin by saying "Thank you" to Bobby Lance and Stan Bridgman who served as elders at the Norfork church of Christ while I was there. I thank them for not only allowing me to *"declare unto you all the counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27), but insisting that I do so. Also, to the men of the Lord's church at Lincoln, Missouri whose desire, likewise, is that those who speak from that pulpit hold back nothing that is profitable to the church (cf. Acts 20:20). Many congregations today would not allow these, and many other lessons from their pulpits.

As one studies, he should constantly expand his knowledge on any given subject, therefore, never just go over the material without reviewing and expanding or deleting where needed.

The original lessons were developed and presented at the Lord's church in Mexico, Missouri in 1981, expanded upon and delivered at Lincoln, Missouri in 1989, then at Norfork, Arkansas in 1999 I again added new material, and the final lesson on "Establishing Authority" presented herein was completed at Lincoln, Missouri in 2017.

With the exception of the final lesson on establishing authority the lessons as presented herein are almost verbatim as presented from the pulpit at Norfork and Lincoln.

A NEGLECTED SUBJECT

Church discipline is a much neglected topic of study in our brotherhood and these lessons only begin to cover the subject. May we ever strive to search and understand all of God's will on this and all biblical subjects.

These lessons are not all original with me. They have been developed from material collected and lessons heard from many sources over the years. So many in fact that I cannot remember all the writers and speakers from whom I have "borrowed" thoughts. Wherever possible I have given recognition to those men, still many are forgotten with time. One thing I have endeavored to do, that is to double-check all material with the Holy Scriptures. Thus, I am convinced that every lesson in this series is correct from God's point of view. However, I ask you, the reader, to take your Bible and double-check and triple-check each statement and lesson again. Never, NEVER take my word, or the word of any other mere man on any religious subject, but rather, be as the Bereans of old who *"received the word with all*

readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

May God richly bless you in your study.

Charles R. Rose

What Does the Bible Say About Church Discipline?

In this lesson we begin a series on the subject of discipline in the Lord's church. I ask for patience as there is a lot of material to cover This first lesson will be introductory in nature for the most part.

Over the years I have found that most of our brethren think of "church discipline" as nothing more, nor less than withdrawing fellowship from a member of the church, and very often it is a means of getting rid of someone they dislike. A thinly-veiled form of vengeance. However, when one really considers what the Bible teaches on the subject, he will find that it is much more than that. In fact, as we study these lessons you will find that "disfellowshipping" a person is a "last-ditch-effort" to get that person to turn away from sin in full repentance and follow Jesus.

I have never known a congregation existing for a number of years without some kind of problem arising. Many times these problems have caused the congregation to split, and on more than a few occasions has resulted in the doors of the church building being closed permanently in that community. Never have I known of a split or doors being closed where everyone involved followed the Holy Bible in resolving the problems. Each time a problem arises wherein someone loses their cool and fights result (whether the fight is verbal or physical), it is the direct result of one or both sides leaving the teachings of God and taking matters into their own hands. And each and every time this has happened Satan has had a "heyday!"

Quite often a preacher will move into a new work, then learn that the congregation is torn asunder with internal problems. This happened to me at one congregation where I preached. The influence of the Lord's church had been destroyed before we moved there. It was from that experience that I first researched and delivered this series of lessons.

When I was talking to the elders about moving to Norfork, in our very first conversation they told me that there had been some problems in the past. I don't know if they were going to tell me what those problems were or not because before they could finish the statement, I asked one question. "Was it a problem wherein the congregation was in the process of disciplining someone?" They answered with a resounding, "NO!" I then said, "In that case I don't even want to hear about it, it is none of my concern." And brethren, to this day I still do not know exactly what those problems were—and I do not want to know! We have one concern and that is to move forward and leave past mistakes which have been repented of behind. If they have been repented of, no one should ever mention them again to anyone. To do so makes the person who brings them up guilty of sin.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

You have no doubt heard the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." That is precisely what these lessons are designed to do. Prevent problems from arising in the future, and let all know exactly what they may expect should they be guilty of causing such problems.

I encourage you to read Revelation chapters two and three, making note of the commands given to those congregations as to the treatment of those who were practicing sin in their midst. For example: the church at Ephesus hated the deeds (that is the sins) of the Nicolaitans, which Christ also hated. But they had left their first love and were in danger of having their candlestick removed. That simply means the entire congregation was in danger of God no longer recognizing them as a congregation of His people. The church at Pergamos had those who taught false doctrines, and the church at Thyatira had a Jezebel who caused some to commit adultery. Christ held the entire congregations equally guilty because they tolerated those sins and allowed them to continue. Therefore, our study is designed to handle problems before they arise.

DEFINE DISCIPLINE

To begin with, we need a good definition for "discipline." Consider this definition from Webster's New Twentieth Century Unabridged Dictionary, page 520. "Discipline:

1. *Training that develops self-control, character, or orderliness and efficiency.*
2. *The result of such training self-control; orderly conduct.*

3. *A system of rules or methods, as for the conduct of members of a monastic order.*
4. *Subject to rule; submissiveness to control.*
5. *Correction; chastisement; punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.*
6. *Anything taught, branch of knowledge or learning.*

With regards to church discipline sections 1, 2, 6 and 5 (in that order) of Webster's definitions are best suited. The main function of church discipline involves training the individual in such a way as to help them develop self-control and orderliness in their lives. This is developed through that branch of knowledge learned through the study of the Holy Scriptures. Generally, teaching is the main way by which the church disciplines. But the time can come when "correction; chastisement; punishment inflicted by way of correction and training" may be more accurate. But be assured that discipline does not necessarily imply punishment although it may include it.

Batsel Barret Baxter once stated: "Discipline is a word which is particularly out of step with our time. Ours is a permissive, indulgent age. It is an age emphasizing no controls, no restraints and no limitations. One of the greatest needs of our day is discipline."

Outline of This Study

We will cover these nine points in this study:

1. **Church discipline is a Bible subject.**
2. **Two kinds of church discipline.**
3. **The purpose of church discipline.**
4. **Why church discipline is not practiced today.**
5. **Who should be disciplined?**
6. **The biblical procedure for church discipline.**
7. **How those disciplined should be treated.**
8. **Objections to church discipline.**
9. **Establishing Authority**

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS A BIBLICAL SUBJECT!

Let us begin this first point by reading eight passages of scripture which deal with this subject: We will use the New King James Version:

> *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. but if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses ever word might be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."*
>
> Matthew 18:15-17

> *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, 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."*
>
> Romans 16:17-18

> *"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexual immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to*

eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves that evil person."

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all."

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which the received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle, so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

"This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage a good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck. Of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

1 Timothy 1:18-20

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, and suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."

1 Timothy 6:3-5

"Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned."

Titus 3:10-11

Upon reading such clear statements, who can deny that the Bible teaches, yea, commands us to practice church discipline? Such statements as: *"let him be to you like a heathen and tax collector," "Mark them," "avoid them," "deliver such a one to Satan," "purge out therefore the old leaven," "not to keep company with," "no not to eat," "from such withdraw yourself."* Such plain statements from the mind of Almighty God revealed to us through the inspired writers of God's Holy Word, the Bible!

THE BLUR OF "TALENTS" WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

John Krivak

I can't stop it. And, I don't believe that anyone can. Set the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) before an American audience, and it will be misunderstood, misinterpreted. Give the job to a teacher who is without equal, and this lesson will still fail delivery. I'm sure Jesus got across the intended meaning. And other cultures have no problem (especially using some language besides English). But set this Parable in perfect clarity before Americans, and incorrect hearing is a fait accompli. Three factors combine to guarantee this failure.

The first factor is insurmountable. The underlying Greek word (derived from Latin) designating amounts of money is "talanta." At its root, this is a measure of weight. Then by extension, the value of money represented by a certain weight of coin. One "talent" was worth fifteen years of the wages of a basic day-laborer—a huge pile of cash. So, what's the problem? The word talanta gets transliterated into English as "talents"—with a totally different meaning. The lender gives—to each of the three borrowers—different talents. There it is, in plain English—and you'll not get the true, original meaning back again: talents now are "the natural endowments of a person"! It's already gone—you can just quit waving your arms and hollering after it, in hopes of getting the true meaning back. Talents now mean talents, and we interpret unfailingly that the lender (God) gives "different talents" to every borrower (that's us). This problem is avoided by Luke (19:11-27). Although this parable is much the same as Matthew's , different vocabulary completely avoids the difficulty. Instead of talents, Luke uses "minas" for the monetary units. However, Matthew's telling will never escape the pull of the emergent English trope. It is too strong in our culture.

A second factor reinforces the first. Now, the first needs no help; America has already settled on the meaning of talents. It's a lock. But carefully notice how the gifting in talents is described: "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey" (Matthew 25:15, NASB). Here, one's personal ability (er, talent?) determines how much each will receive. Isn't this another on-ramp that leads to the same place—money divvied unequally among people of varied talent, or natural ability? The American interpretation is now twice-sealed with a double lock. The safeguard could not

be cracked by Houdini himself. The winning interpretation resonates solidly with American sensibilities. It is thick in the cultural air that we all breathe. This American reading is attractive, because it means God will judge us with different standards, according to our talents! Some have entrepreneurial skills; some just don't. Sounds good, until you read the Parable closely.

Previously in Matthew 24, Jesus has announced His Parousia—a final return to judge mankind. It will follow the sooner 70 AD judgment, which is helpfully preceded by warning signs. However, the final "coming of Jesus" is without warning—like a thief in the night. Perpetual vigilance is demanded, and this theme arches over Matthew 25. The two winners and the lone loser in the Talents Parable exemplify both success and failure to heed this dire warning. Notice carefully that, according to Jesus, greater or lesser amounts (of talent-money) are inconsequential toward the outcome! Rather, the key determinant is the particular attitude that each borrower pitches toward the lender. The two with favorable attitudes (despite their differing levels of "talent") work to success, meeting the lender's expectations in a happy, celebratory way. The low-talent borrower (I hope you know what I mean!) sports the bad attitude that infuriates the lender: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed." Wasn't America expecting the condemning lender to "go easy" on the less-gifted (one talent) guy? That never happens—instead, he is the one to get hammered for his failure! The popular American reading makes hash of the Parable. The interpretation does not fit.

The third factor derives from my exegesis of American culture. We are a cult of personality. From ancient times, the Bible focus was on character, in terms of virtue. No longer. What is now valued is personality. Even the unbeliever has one. It is there even from birth. Personality, like a fingerprint, is absolutely unique to each of us. Even sour atheists find it comfortable to describe personality as "a gift." Believers and unbelievers can alike make a claim here.

Even though each one of us is strictly unique, we like to systematize personality into carefully defined categories. Such systems explain how we are alike, or how we are different from each other. Personality blots out any distinctions of virtue or character. Rather, personality boasts its own explanatory power over why some people seem better (or worse) than others. Systems of spirituality (that demand responsible virtue and moral character) get no traction in our personality-driven culture. Forget all that. As long as we understand that we are all gifted with personality, it is no bother to call the giver God—if that is your preference. Our culture sees personal "talents" as the key factor of personality. So, without fail, our culture wrongly interprets the Parable.

There are many, many systems of personality. Do an internet search, and you will find a great variety. Some are quite ancient—like the Four Temperaments (sanguine, melancholy, choleric, phlegmatic), or the Enneagram. Some systems are regarded as science-based; others as pseudo-science. For example, unscientific astrology, with its zodiac of stellar constellations, explains characteristic tendencies of twelve different temperaments. Other systems rely on the "behavioral sciences"—the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Such systems divide into various numbers of personality categories—four, nine, twelve, sixteen, whatever. A detailed questionnaire may be used to determine which category gives you the best fit.

Some systems are meaningless, hardly worthy of scorn and ridicule. Others offer valuable insights. I have found them helpful. Couples can use them, before and after marriage, to better understand one another. Businesses may gain insight into group functioning among the staff. Even churches are helped to understand interpersonal dynamics within ministry teams.

Now, the Bible simply makes passing notes on personalities, never developing its own categorical system. Christians must avoid the excessive personality-pull of the larger culture. Our vision will blur, making true knowing impossible (as with the Parable). This is a danger. Especially, gifts of personality may be confused with spiritual gifts (from God). I have encountered two systems that seek to correlate spiritual gifts with personality. One is the enneagram. The nine personality types lend themselves to characteristic roles and tendencies. The enneagram has found its way into some Christian circles. Yet another system, which is discussed here, claims to identify "spiritual gifts" according to ten personality types (one of which is "missionary"). Christians may struggle to identify their true spiritual gift. This system promises to help us discover it.

I will try to be fair in assessing this system, and careful in its critique. As with other personality systems, I find this one helpful. It gives careful attention to Scripture, and it obviously took hard work to produce it. As above, I could see it helpfully enabling better understanding of others and of self. It is useful as a way to identify tendencies of personality and temperament. I would not at all be opposed to its use for this purpose. Where I demur, however, is using these personality categories for the purpose of identifying spiritual gifts. This system identifies natural skills (talents), which are altogether different from spiritual gifts. To blur these categories is a mistake.

Compare two approaches to spiritual gifts. Both use the Bible. One takes a rather inductive assessment of the relevant Scriptures. Facts are gathered and assembled into conclusions. The other, the "personality driven" approach, applies a deductive method. It begins with already-established categories of personality, and seeks to embed them inside the Biblical framework. Like a mother cuckoo bird that sneaks her eggs into the nest of another species, the personality system is snuck into the Bible. And any personality system will do. One personality sounds like an exhorter; another like a prophet; another like a priest. Just go to any bookseller, and do a search of "identifying your spiritual gift" (or similar to that). Like a fooled mother bird, readers will be led to think the personality system belongs in the Bible. That egg hatches with all the others.

Note another major distinction. A Biblical understanding of gifting is truly supernatural (even if some gifts seem rather non-miraculous). However, personality systems need only naturalism, nothing more. Your "gift" is there from birth, built right in. It is bound up in your DNA. These gifts differ, not at all, before and after baptism. They belong to Christians and non-Christians alike. In this, isn't supernaturalism once again being displaced by our culture's aggressive naturalism? Is supernatural gifting (by the Holy Spirit) replaced now by the essentially natural gifting of personality? Is this another pull of our culture? Another blur? Too commonly, the Spirit is avoided in preaching and in prayer; avoided as a go-to source of wisdom and power; avoided as the ready explanation of life experience. Why? Because naturalism dominates our culture, and we are pressured to acquiesce. Be intentional to discern the supernatural, or we will blur also: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

Notice how this system develops its category of missionary. It starts with Ephesians 4:11—"And He gave some as apostles…" An anchor role within the Bible is sought for each temperament. Of course, the gift of apostle is no longer available. That would snag on claims to authority, and this system thankfully avoids that. So then, what modern function corresponds? Well, a missionary is "kinda, sorta like that"—an apostle-like message bearer. Those who have personality traits that seem advantageous to this function are identified with the "spiritual gift" of apostle/missionary. That blur brings two problems.

I knew two missionaries to Japan, yet the same personality mold could not hold them both! The introvert was careful to the extreme about how, even subtle gestures, would be interpreted in that culture. Quite contrary, the extrovert was an unapologetically brash Texan. Now, he had no intention of seeming rude. Rather, he aimed to be fully authentic: "By gosh, this is who I am!" Both had great success in the role of missionary, yet no commonly shared personality had anything to do with it. Even so, God had gifted them both for the same ministry. There is simply no direct correlation between type of personality and type of ministry, in terms of spiritual gifting.

The problem is that, in this system, apostle (or if you prefer, missionary) has become a personality type! We must not blur the two. Any who fits into this category might claim, "This is my spiritual gift!" That would often (though perhaps not always) be a false claim. This system claims to identify spiritual giftedness. However, God never restricts any "spiritual gift" to any one particular personality type. Such claim is not demonstrated in Scripture. If it were true, would we not see all apostles (or all evangelists, all prophets, etc.) sharing some "cookie-cutter personality"? As it is, doubting Thomas, and loving John, and impetuous Peter do not share the same personality. Even if we step down to modern missionaries, personality does not and cannot indicate a spiritual gift. This use of the system is *reductio ad absurdum*. To the contrary, when God gifts, many (perhaps all) personality types will equally work in any given role. At a preachers' dinner, the master of

ceremony declared: “Thank God, that all of us are not exactly like any one of us!”

Using personality to identify one’s spiritual gift is proven wrong another way. It depends on each personality to carry unique advantages. This makes certain tasks easier and so more natural—as with the most common phobia, public speaking. We may think that role is best served by outgoing, confident, and articulate personalities. God, however, commonly gifts the least likely personality! In his ministry, Timothy seemed to have an obvious weakness of personality (timidity), where we might be inclined to dial-up strength: “For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline” (2 Timothy 1:6–7). This was not part of his natural skill set; yet it was bound up in his spiritual gift. His giftedness for ministry ran counter to his personality type: “Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work” (1 Corinthians 16:10). With our cultural sensibilities, we might think that evangelistic ministry was just not Timothy’s gift! We would be quite wrong to do so.

So, if this personality system (or any other) proves helpful (as a practical guide to personality function among spiritual people), then I would be a grateful supporter. It has a useful place. However, it is no identifier of spiritual gifts! Personality is a gift enjoyed by one and all; naturally so. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit—not to everyone who is naturally endowed with talents, but only to those who are chosen. These giftings depend not on personality type; they may run quite contrary to natural endowment. Rather, they depend on grace: “...we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Romans 12:6). And, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:11–13). Every individual Christian receives one (or more) of these gifts. Such gifts do not neatly correlate with personality types.

Now, what does “talents” mean, again?

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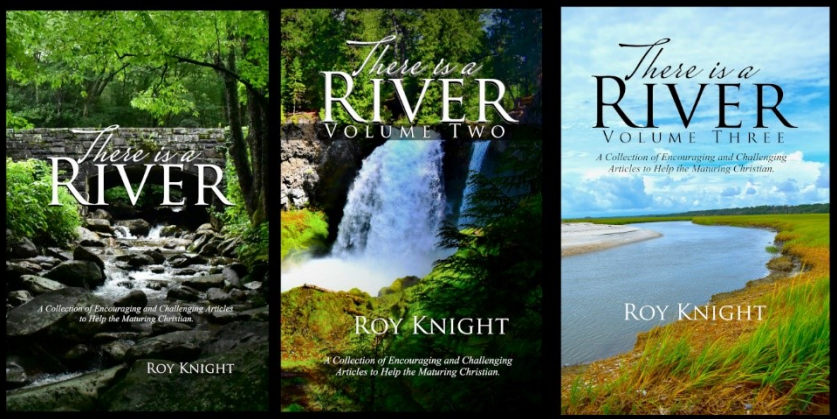

1 Corinthians 5

A new translation and commentary

Matthew Shaffer

"It is well known that there is sexual immorality among you, and such immorality as cannot even be found among the Gentiles – such that a man has his father's wife! And are you proud, when you should rather be grieving to the point that the one who has done this thing should be taken away from you? For I, though I am absent in body, but present in spirit, have already determined what should happen with the one who has done this as though I were present: that you – when you are assembled together in the name of our Lord Jesus along with my spirit and with the power of the Lord Jesus – should hand one such as this over to Satan so that his flesh will be destroyed, this way his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.

It is not good that you boast. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Cleanse yourself of the old leaven so that you might be a new lump of dough, even as you are unleavened. For Christ was also sacrificed as our Passover lamb. Therefore, let us not make our feast out of the old leaven or the leaven of depravity and wickedness, but rather let us eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with those who were sexually immoral, but this certainly does not mean the immoral people of the world, or those who are greedy and extortioners, or idolators, since then you would be obligated to withdraw from the world entirely. But, in reality, I have written to you that you should not associate with anyone who, while called a brother, is immoral, or greedy, or an idolator, or is abusive toward others, or is a drunkard, or an extortioner. Do not even eat with such a person! For why would it fall to me to judge those who are outside? Do you not judge those who are within your number? God, however, will judge those who are outside. 'Remove the evil one from among you.'"

Notes on the Translation

1: *"It is well known…"* – Most translations translate this phrase as something like "it is actually reported…" (NASB 1995, NKJV, ESV, NIV,

NRSV). In these translations, the word "actually" communicates the Greek word ὅλως (ho-los), which can indicate either a wide scale – *completely, wholly, everywhere* – or the reality of an incredible fact – *actually, in fact*[42]. Either interpretation is possible here, but I think it is more likely that Paul is indicating that the news of this man's sin had spread far and wide, so that he knew about it before they ever wrote to him. This would make it a contrast to Paul's introduction to the topic of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV): "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me…" Perhaps they had not written about this man's immorality, but Paul knew from the widespread report.

3-5: *"[I] have already determined… [you] should hand one such as this over to Satan…"* – These three verses are a single, complex sentence in Greek, which is very difficult to translate literally into English. The main clause – or central thought – of the sentence is as follows:

> *"I have already determined that you should hand the one who has done this thing over to Satan."*

The rest of the sentence describes either the situation in which Paul made the determination or how the Corinthians should follow through with his determination.

> *"I am absent in body but present in spirit, [so I made this determination] as if I were present with you."*
>
> *"[You should hand him over to Satan] when you are assembled together in the name of our Lord Jesus; and my spirit and the power of the Lord Jesus will be with you [when you execute this judgment]."*

Most translations find it easiest to split the sentence into two, as with the NKJV, "For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan," though some make an effort to connect the two, as the NASB 1995 in verse 5: "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan;" and the NRSV: "You are to hand this man over to Satan."

I have tried to preserve the unity of the sentence while still making good sense in English, since a strictly literal translation will tend to be more confusing than clarifying in this case.

8: *"Let us not make our feast out of… but rather let us eat…"* – This phrase is usually translated a little more passively, as in the NASB 1995: *"Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with… but with…"* I have translated it a little more actively to emphasize the responsibility that Paul is placing on the Corinthians. The Christian life is like a Passover feast, and Christ has provided Himself as the lamb. However, the Passover was always eaten with unleavened bread (cf. Deuteronomy 16:1-8), so the lamb was not the only significant element. Paul tells the Corinthians that they are, in effect, the bread that filled out the feast alongside Christ, the lamb. It was improper for them to bring leavened bread to the Passover feast, so they needed to ensure that they, as a congregation, were unleavened – that there was no corrupting sin among their members. Thus, they were not just keeping the feast, but they were providing a part of it by how they conducted themselves as a congregation.

Out of the World:
Comments on 1 Corinthians 5

Introduction

Once Paul had established the fundamental principles of Christian unity and of truth and service to God, he turned his attention to the specific problems that were plaguing the Corinthian congregation. Some members of the congregation had sent him a letter describing the divisions in their number (1 Corinthians 1:11), and Paul did address the concerns that letter revealed to him (1 Corinthians 7:1), but this chapter addresses a more pressing situation – one that threatened not only to cause a division in the church but also to lead to the total moral corruption of the whole group. Because of this dire state of affairs, Paul used sharp, though not unkind language to address the Corinthians. They needed to act, and soon.

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[42] 8 Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 704. Logos.

1-5

First, Paul reveals that he did not learn about this situation from the Corinthians themselves. Whether they neglected to mention it in their letter, or if the news had traveled such that Paul had already heard about it before their letter reached him, we cannot say. However, it is clear that the news had spread far and wide, and yet the congregation had done nothing to correct the situation. As a result, everyone was generally appalled at them.

The problem itself was very plain – a man, a brother in the church, was committing sexual immorality with his father's wife. The language Paul used suggests that this was his stepmother, not his biological mother, but that fact does not lessen the severity of their sin. Paul did not go into detail about the situation, instead he appealed to the fact that their choices were so unambiguously wrong that even the most corrupt human societies who had no knowledge of God would condemn them. No one had to ask if the relationship was wrong, and Paul did not need to explain. Everyone already knew.

However, the Corinthian Christians did not react the way one would expect them to in this case. We might expect them to be shocked and horrified when the sin was brought to light – that they would have displayed some kind of revulsion. This sort of a reaction would necessarily have led to a separation between the one who was sinning and those who were trying to lead holy and righteous lives. But this was not how they reacted. Instead, they maintained a level of pride – perhaps they thought that this brother's actions did not reflect on the rest of the congregation, or they felt that his actions would not influence them one way or another. They did not react, they simply kept on about their lives as if nothing had ever happened.

For this reason, Paul rebuked them. He, even though he had not been to Corinth since this sin came to light, could see clearly what had to happen. The congregation needed to come together in an official capacity – the phrase, "when you are assembled together in the name of our Lord Jesus," seems to refer to what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:15-20. There, Jesus explained to His apostles how to execute discipline as His servants. The process involved four steps:

1. One Christian, who has observed another sinning, should discuss it with the other privately. Ideally, the two will agree, the one at fault will correct his behavior, and all will be well between them.
2. If the one at fault will not discuss it or correct his behavior, then two or three should confront him together. This way, if he will not hear them together, they can act as witnesses in front of the whole congregation.
3. When the whole congregation has come together, the two or three witnesses should tell them what has happened, and the congregation will pronounce their judgment against the one at fault.
4. If he will not hear even the whole congregation, it becomes their responsibility to put him out of the assembly and to have no more association with him unless and until he has corrected his course.

In Matthew 18:20, when He explained this process, Jesus promised that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (NKJV). I understand this to mean that, when the witnesses come together to present the matter to the whole assembly, Christ is there with them in His authority. In other words, the congregation is not passing judgment based on their own thoughts and abilities, but rather they are acting *with* and *for* Christ. This was meant to reassure the apostles, that they would have help and support from above when they had to undertake the difficult task of discipline.

It seems that Paul's words were meant to reassure the Corinthians the same way in our passage. He told them to hand the sinning brother over to Satan "when you are assembled together in the name of our Lord Jesus, *along with my spirit and with the power of the Lord Jesus*." They could be confident when they executed judgment against him because Paul's judgment – which he was able to make even though he was not present – and Christ's power stood with them. All they needed to do in this case was to agree with Paul and Christ, and to carry out the sentence.

It was necessary that this brother be handed over to Satan – that is, put out of the assembly and the association of the congregation – "so that his flesh will be destroyed." This is to say that he needed to suffer. This was not a spiteful or sadistic punishment, but one that was calculated to help him realize that his body would be broken and that a life of

pleasure would gain him nothing. Paul hoped that he would realize in time that he needed to save his spirit.

6-8

In these verses, Paul presented the Passover to the Corinthians as a symbolic representation of their life together as a congregation to explain why discipline was so important. The Passover was a feast that the Israelites observed to remember how God saved them when they were slaves in Egypt. Paul drew out two culinary elements of the feast (which are described in full in Exodus 12:1-20 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8):

1. The Passover lamb, whose blood marked the Israelites and protected them from the Lord's judgment against the Egyptians.
2. Unleavened bread, which represented affliction (Deuteronomy 16:3), in that it reminded the Israelites of their escape from Egyptian captivity.

Paul represented the Christian life as a parallel to this feast, which demonstrates the active role that we have to take in our own salvation. Christ provided the lamb when He sacrificed Himself, but this is only one part of the feast. We, in our congregations, provide the bread. When we read of the Passover, it is plain that only one kind of bread was acceptable – unleavened – and it was wrong for the Israelites to allow any leavening or yeast to even come near their houses, so that it was impossible for their unleavened bread to become leavened. They had to be deliberate and careful that their feast was pure and uncorrupted.

Paul explained the concept through the symbolism of the Passover, but he did not leave any of his symbols unexplained. The Corinthians needed to be sure that they separated all depravity and wickedness from their bread – which was their congregation – and make sure that sincerity and truth were all that remained. This required a process of cleansing, and this was why discipline was so important in the case of this man who was sinning with his stepmother. If he were to remain in the congregation, his moral depravity would have an impact on the rest of them. It is impossible to avoid this kind of corruption entirely unless we remove ourselves from it completely. This involves cleansing ourselves and our lives of wickedness (see, for example, James 1:21-25), as well as exercising discipline against those who will not give up their wicked ways.

This perspective demands that we think about our spiritual lives in the context of our local congregation. Our spiritual wellbeing is not just a matter to be determined between us and God alone – it is rather closely bound to our relationship with our fellow Christians. Paul has urged the Corinthians throughout the letter to adopt a common purpose in Christ so that they can grow together and support one another. When the church comes together, it is meant to be a productive time working together on our common goal. With this view, what are we to do with someone who is called a brother, but whose actions and decisions are actually counterproductive to our common goal? It was necessary for the Corinthians to exclude the sinning brother from their number – to the point that they should not even share a meal with him (v. 11) – so that his depravity could not discourage those who remained, nor could his choices do any sort of harm to the congregation's progress toward its goals.

9-10

It is difficult to say which letter Paul meant in this passage. He may have written an earlier letter that has not been preserved as part of the New Testament – this would not be problematic for the inspiration of the New Testament. We do not need to have every word that Paul ever wrote to have faith that the Holy Spirit has preserved what we need for our spiritual lives today. However, it is also possible that Paul is referring to what he wrote earlier in this chapter, though his wording is a little bit unusual. In either case, this phrase acts as a transition – we have seen that it is important for the congregation to separate itself from willful sinners, but how far does this obligation go? Is it important for us to remove ourselves from everyone who is guilty of any kind of sin? Is this the only way to keep our purity in view of Christ's sacrifice?

The answer is no, Paul did not intend to limit the Corinthians' ability to interact with those around them. Practically, the Corinthians probably were not prepared to take on a self-sufficient lifestyle. They needed food and clothing; they needed access to jobs and markets so that they could provide for themselves and sell what they produced. In the modern era, we might not have access to water or power if we had to cut ourselves off from anyone who was not a Christian. It could not easily be done, and it would be counterproductive toward our evangelistic interests. How could we teach our friends, families,

and neighbors about Christ if we could not have any sort of social contact with them? How could we shine as lights in the world if we kept our distance? Our actions and decisions will set us apart from those around us, but our responsibilities toward sinners in our congregation is different from our responsibilities toward those who are outside.

11-13

The patience or hope that we would show to those who are outside our congregation cannot be applied to a brother or sister in Christ who refuses to leave the things of the world behind. As we have seen, we have a common responsibility to work productively toward our common goal as the people of God – we must become that new, unleavened lump. We cannot both belong to Christ and still live as if nothing has changed. We have committed ourselves to a path that will carry us closer to God with every step, and nothing in our lives can remain untouched. This is especially true for the things that are so openly opposed to the system of morality that God has ordained for us from the beginning that even those who are not Christians know that they are wrong. Consider the sins that Paul mentioned in this passage:

We cannot both belong to Christ and still live as if nothing has changed.

1. Immorality – Sexuality can be a good thing that glorifies God, when expressed properly (Ephesians 5:22-33). However, when it is abused, sexuality can be a disturbing and destructive force. When someone who is called a Christian gives control of his body over to such a damaging influence, he makes it clear that God is not the controlling factor in his life.
2. Greed – This word implies someone who is addicted to gain – whether material possessions, wealth, or power. This person is led by the hope of aggrandizement, not the Spirit of God.
3. Idolatry – How can someone claim to be faithful to God while worshipping other deities? Anyone who commits to another religious belief makes it clear that he does not have faith in God.
4. Abuse toward others – People who are abusive toward others – specifically verbally – likely find their self-worth in their ability to feel superior to others. This conceit leads them to tear others down, rather than to encourage growth and spiritual development in the congregation.
5. Drunkenness – A Christian in our number who is fighting to overcome an addiction to alcohol or some other intoxicant needs our help and support, but one who willingly and freely gives himself over to an intoxicant is denying God the opportunity to lead his life.
6. Extortion – An extortioner is much like someone led by greed. The difference is that an extortioner hopes not only to gain something but to injure someone else in the process. These people have no love for their fellow man, and so they certainly cannot help to build them up and protect them as they grow together in Christ.

It appears that Paul was not encouraging the Corinthians to cast out everyone who had ever sinned, but rather he focused on the influences that could pull God's children away from Him. Congregational discipline is designed to keep the group focused, healthy, and productive in view of their common goals. It is not a pleasant thing to exercise judgment and discipline against a brother or a sister, but it is necessary when we think about the congregation as a body that is moving on a trajectory. This will also send a clear message to the one who is being excluded. Our purpose as Christians matters, and we cannot allow anything to halt our progress in that direction.

But this is as far as our responsibility goes. God has given Christians neither the right nor the power to judge and discipline the world. He will take care of that. However, He has entrusted the leaders of every congregation with the right *and* responsibility to maintain a positive and productive culture in their assemblies. We will not be held guiltless if we neglect to care for those God has entrusted to our care.

Modern Ananiases

Barton W. Stone

Saul of Tarsus had been praying and fasting three days, without any comfortable assurance of pardon and acceptance with God; and on the same principle he might have prayed three years longer, and ten times three years, and still have remained without any assurance of pardon and acceptance, unless Ananias had been sent to him, and taught him what to do.

I see many weeping and mourning, and praying day and night, like Saul, under the conviction of sin. I have seen the modern Ananiases going to them, and I have heard them teach what they must do. Says one, "Poor sinner, wait upon God in prayer—he will in his good time, hear and answer you. Go to the anxious seat, and let the ministers of the Lord pray for you."

"Alas!" says the mourner, "I have been thus engaged for many months with all the sincerity of my heart, and am as far from obtaining comfort and salvation as at first—I am often on the eve of giving up to despair."

"Ah," says the modern Ananias, "you pray in unbelief, you must have faith before your prayers will be heard."

"Do tell me how shall I get faith; I would give a world, if a world were mine, to believe in Jesus: Do, tell me, how shall I get faith?"

The modern Ananias replies, "You must pray for faith, and strive till you get it. God will give it in his good time, and way."

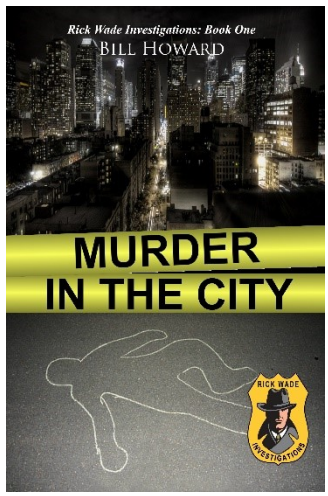
Says the poor mourner, "My dear sir, do I understand you. You tell me to pray for faith—yet you tell me I must pray in faith, or I shall not be heard, I shall not obtain faith. Is not this to tantalize me, to mock my fears; and prejudice my mind against God? If I understand you, I must have faith before I can have it; or which is the same, I must pray in faith, before I can obtain it."

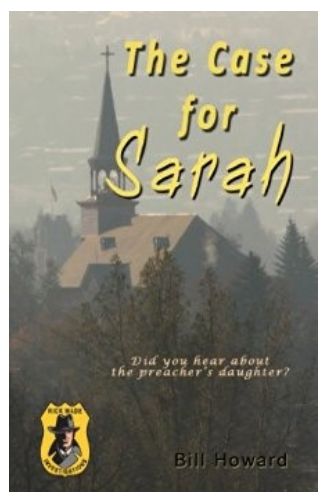
I have seen many thus instructed, who became discouraged, then offended, and at last became despondent, or infidels, or more hardened sinners than ever before. Infidelity has slain its thousands, but this doctrine has slain its ten thousands. It has leavened the whole mass of Christendom, both of saints and sinners. They are taught to look for some physical, mysterious, divine operation within them to produce faith, repentance and regeneration—till this is effected, they cannot please God, or do anything acceptable in his sight; all they do is sin—their very prayers are sinful. While thus waiting for these operations they are hardening in sin—growing in unbelief—and more unconcerned respecting eternal things. This is one and not the least reason why the preaching of the Gospel has so little effect upon the world. Till a ministry arise in the true spirit of Ananias, or of the Apostles, who shall be constrained by the love of Christ to cry aloud and spare not, to rouse a sleeping world to awake and see themselves ruined by sin—till a ministry arise to administer, not the letter, but the Spirit—teaching them that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes it—that it effectually works in them that believe—that it is the word of reconciliation—that it is spirit and life—that it is the word of God—that nothing is required of the sinner in order to salvation, but to believe, repent and be baptized, and afterwards to do all things commanded—that now is the accepted time and day of salvation—that God waits to be gracious, and will cast out none that comes to him,—till such a ministry arise—in vain we hope to see the fall of mystery Babylon, and the world gathered to Christ.

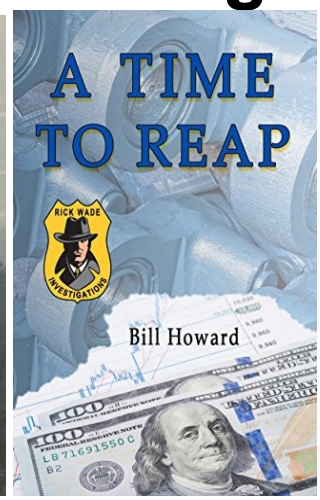
A few there are who thus believe, and who thus direct the poor sinner; but the current of opposition, flowing from every sect from the one body, and now uniting in one mighty stream, bears hard against us, and by its mighty roaring almost drowns the voice of truth. Some amongst ourselves, professed friends of reformation, more seriously wound the cause and discourage the real advocates of truth, than our own adversaries. They profess to be enemies to sectarianism, and are loud in their denunciations of it; yet are they rigid sectarians in heart, and wish to build up a sectarian establishment—they zealously denounce the doctrine that opinions of truth should be the causes of disunion among Christians; yet urge their own opinions as tests I fellowship and union—they warmly contend that all Christians should be

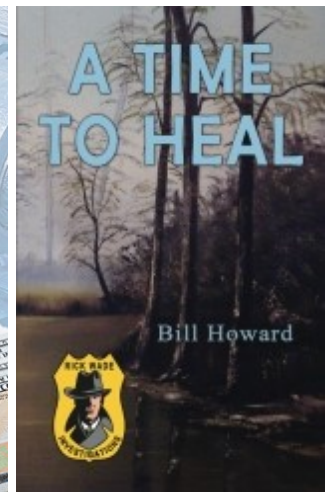
united in one body; yet they show from their conduct, that by the one body they mean themselves—they plead well for brotherly love; yet their love is confined to their party—they insist loudly upon Christian forbearance; yet are intolerant to such as do not receive their dogmas. These things ought not to be—they must be banished before Zion's wheels can swiftly move. Let such discordant, such discontented spirits take their stand under the banners of some sect already formed, or form a new one. Spirits violent for the truth—spirits of moral courage—spirits willing to sacrifice their names, their wealth, ease, popularity, and life itself, to truth—spirits of this character are called for. Such an army is now mustering under our King to take the field, against the countless hosts of Sectarians, A systematic coalition of the parties under the imposing name of orthodoxy, seems to be forming against the few advocates of truth. Let us fearlessly advance under the banners of Immanuel—let our watch word be, The Bible—let our armory be that worn by the primitive Christians, "our loins girt about with truth, having on the breastplate of righteousness—our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace—above all taking the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God—praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." In this armory they subdued kingdoms, principalities and powers—armed with the same, we shall conquer too. Let us beware lest we use carnal weapons—too often have these been tried, but tried to the injury of the good cause. We need not look for favor from sectarians—we boldly profess that sectarianism is what we war against. This they know, and this is the great cause of their hostility against us—our object is the conversion of the world; but we know that sectarianism must die before this event can take place, as the scriptures teach us. As soon as we convince a sectarian of this truth, if a good man, he forsakes his party and falls into the ranks of those who fight under Immanuel's standard. We have said, our object is the conversion of the world. At this, the high-toned orthodox may "grin a ghastly smile."—Let such know, that a few Fishermen under the orders of King Immanuel, once conquered the Roman Empire. The same King yet reigns, the same power yet exists, and the same Spirit is yet in his devoted followers, and the same effects will yet follow. Hear him speak, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Help, Lord, for the glory of thy name. Through thee, strengthening us, we can do all things. Amen

Rick Wade: Investigations









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About The AUTHORS

Myron Bruce and his wife Vicki were married in 1989 and have been blessed with three children. He has been in full-time ministry for the past 20 years. Most recently, as the pulpit minister for the Southwest church of Christ in OKC. Previously, Myron served for 14 years as a classroom teacher and educational administrator on all levels. In 2011, his deepest aspiration reached a milestone as he began the development of the seminar, "Singing with the Spirit." A seminar where churches are taught how to better understand the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Dewayne Bryant is Assistant Professor of Bible at Faulkner University in Montgomery, AL. He is an auxiliary staff writer for Apologetics Press, a contributing writer for *The Daily Apologist*, and author of *12 Compelling Truths* and *Who is Like the Lord?* He aspires to be a contestant on The Great British Baking Show one day.

Bill Burk has preached for the Crandall Church of Christ in Crandall, Texas, since 2011. He is married to Leda, and they have three daughters, Breanna, Bella, and Brook.

Gantt Carter is simultaneously an actor, a preacher, a writer, and star of stage, screen, and pulpit. He also claims to be a plain preacher who preaches on the plains ("where the wind comes sweeping down the plains…").

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.

Kyle Frank preaches for two congregations in upper New York, and is enjoying it. He loves reading books by brethren, and is currently studying church history and the Bible lands.

Nathan Franson has been serving as the pulpit minister for the Mariposa Avenue church of Christ in Citrus Heights, California since 2017. Before that, he preached at Kissimmee church of Christ in Florida for 8 years. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. Nathan grew up in Salt Lake City, Utah, having spent his first 20 years in the LDS Church before studying his way out of it. He has taught much about the errors of the Mormon faith and has authored a book titled Breaking the Chains, an autobiography of why he left the Mormon Church. He conducts a seminar titled, What to Know When Talking to a Mormon. He also manages Mormon Study Media (www.mormonstudy.net) and has released numerous videos. Nathan lives in Antelope, CA with his wife, Katy, and son, Micah. They all are active in Taekwondo.

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.

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 Bible and Biblical Languages at Harding University. He can be contacted at jkrivak@zoominternet.net.

Lee Parish is a follower of Christ, a husband to Julia, a father to Jeremiah, Micah, Noah, and Ezra, and an evangelist in Marlow, OK. He is a 2013 graduate of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

Neal Pollard has preached full-time for 31 years (AL, VA, CO, KY), serving with Lehman Avenue since August, 2019. He and Kathy married in 1992 and have three married sons (Gary-Chelsea; Dale-Janelle; Carl-Emily). Has done preacher training for 15 years with the Bear Valley Bible Institute and Georgia School of Theology.

Daniel Richardson is happily married and he and his wife have nine children, ranging from 1 to 21 years old. He worships with the Redland Road church of Christ in Wetumpka, AL.

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 married 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.

Barton W. Stone was a former Presbyterian preacher who boldly rejected their denominational doctrines, dogmas, and creeds in order to preach the simple gospel as found in the Bible. He was the editor of the *Christian Messenger*, and is included in the "Big Four" of important Restoration Movement figures.

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

Bradley S. Cobb will soon be giving a paid lecture at the university he dropped out of. He was told by a doctorate student that he is living the scholar's dream. Afterwards, he and his lovely wife will retreat. Three weeks into the year, and he hasn't broken a New Year's resolution this year… yet.

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