

Soldiers Of The Cross



Hosted by the Southaven Church of Christ
Southaven, Mississippi

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ISBN 1-930999-24-0

Southaven Church of Christ
POWER Publications



P. O. Box 616
Pulaski, TN 38478
931-363-6905

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Am I A Soldier Of The Cross?

Robert Jefferies



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With each passing year, my love for the Southaven Church of Christ continues to abound more and more. From the day we first started our work in December of 2007, you accepted us as family. Since that time, our family has grown from just Blair and myself to a family of five. We count it an honor and a privilege not only to work with the Southaven family, but also to be a member of this church family. Thank you for the great love that you have extended our way.

Introduction

When we open up the Word of God, we are fascinated to see the way certain things are described. For example, the kingdom of Heaven has been likened to a mustard seed (KJV, Mat. 13:31-32), leaven (Mat. 13:33), a hidden treasure (Mat. 13:44), and even a pearl of great price (Mat. 13:45-46). The church has been described as a family (Mat. 12:46-50), the

bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33), a kingdom (John 18:33-37), a body (Eph. 1:21-23), and the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Our Lord has described Himself in a number of ways. He has described Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35; John 6:48); the light of the world (John 8:12; John 9:5); the door (John 10:9); the good shepherd (John 10:11); the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); and the true vine (John 15:1). Did you know that followers of Christ are described in certain ways as well? Over and over again throughout the New Testament, followers are described as “disciples” (Acts 6:1-2; Acts 6:7; Acts 9:1; Acts 9:19; Acts 18:23; Acts 18:27). At times they were called people of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:23; Acts 24:14; Acts 24:22). Three times followers of Christ are called “Christians” (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). In Paul’s second inspired letter to Timothy, he referred to followers of Christ in three unique ways:

You therefore must endure hardship as a good **soldier** of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone **competes in athletics**, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking **farmer** must be first to partake of the crops. (2 Tim. 2:3-6; emphasis RJ)

For this particular study, we want to zero in on the description of a “soldier.” The concept of being a soldier in the Lord’s army is referred to a number of times in the Scriptures (Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3; 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Not only

is this idea found in the Scriptures, it is also found in some of the songs that we sing—“Onward Christian Soldiers,” “Soldiers of Christ Arise,” and “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”

In this lecture, we want to center our attention upon five major thoughts: (1) A soldier must enlist in the Lord’s Army. (2) A soldier must submit to his commander. (3) A soldier must understand his mission. (4) A soldier must be disciplined. (5) What should a potential soldier consider before enlisting?

A Soldier Must Enlist In God’s Army

The word *enlist* means “to enter some cause.” There are several armed forces in the United States of America from which to choose, and each one has a different set of requirements depending upon the branch. For example, if you want to join the Army, you must meet specific age, citizenship, academic, physical, and legal qualifications first. If you do not meet these minimum requirements, you cannot enlist.

In like manner, if you choose to enlist in the Lord’s Army and become a soldier of the cross, you must meet certain requirements and you cannot enter if you do not meet them. What are the requirements that must be met?

Hear The Word.

The Apostle Paul tells us something very important about hearing. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). In Acts 8, Phillip talked with the eunuch and began to preach unto him Jesus. Why? Because this man needed to hear the Good News (Acts 8:35).

Believe What Has Been Taught.

Upon hearing the Good News about Jesus, one needs to believe in Him. Jesus said, “I said therefore unto you, that

ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Repent.

When one repents, he is acknowledging that he has been traveling the wrong way in life and is turning to follow God’s way. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Make The Great Confession.

As the Ethiopian heard the good news, he responded, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:36-37).

Be Baptized.

Why? To have our sins washed away. “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). In addition to this, baptism is where we are placed into Christ (Gal. 3:27). When one is in Christ, he is in the Lord’s army.

A Soldier Must Submit To His Commander

For so many, it is all about “my” wants, desires, needs, and rights. However, when it comes to being a soldier, one cannot act on his own. A chain of command must be followed and one must realize it is not about “me.” For example, in the Army, the chain of command consists of twenty-nine different positions ranking from private to general (“US Army”). The General answers to the Chief of Staff, who answers to the Secretary of Defense, and they answer to the Commander In Chief. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about a time when Jews and Gentiles would have someone to lead over them. “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, **a leader and commander to the people**” (Isa.

55:4; emphasis RJ). That leader and commander would be the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as our captain, which once again suggests there is a chain of command. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the **captain** of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10; emphasis RJ). During our Lord’s ministry, Jesus asked a very pointed question that was recorded by Luke, “And why call ye me, **Lord, Lord**, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46; emphasis RJ). The word “Lord” in this context means “master.” Why do you acknowledge me as your master (someone in authority) and yet you do not submit to that authority?

Jesus is our Commander in Chief and we are His followers. His will, not ours, governs us. We are not at liberty to keep certain commands from our leader and neglect others. In fact, John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). The commands that are given are designed to be to our benefit. In like manner, the commands that our Commander in Chief gives to our military are designed to be in the best interests of the United States of America.

What is our motivation for enlisting and following our Commander in Chief? Physically, one might enlist in the military for certain benefits. Soldiers might enter for financial benefits, education benefits, health benefits, retirement benefits, or they could be standing up for something they truly believe in. Spiritually, one’s motivation to enlist and follow the Commander in Chief should be love. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). When we consider what our leader was willing to do for us, it should cause us to be willing to serve and submit to Him.

What did our commander do for us? (1) He made himself of no reputation. “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phi. 2:7). (2) He died the cruelest death for us. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phi. 2:8). What motivated this? Obedience to the Father and His great love for mankind. In the previous verse mentioned, Paul wrote that He was obedient unto death. This was all a part of God’s plan (John 3:16; John 4:34; John 6:38). But it was motivated by love as well, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

A Soldier Must Understand His Mission

One of the members at Southaven, Charles Reid, served in the Army for thirty years. This writer was privileged to sit down and interview Brother Reid and ask questions concerning his time in the military. One of the interesting observations that he made was this: **“Everything is mission oriented.”** Every assignment is given with a mission in mind.

Spiritually, what is our mission?

Our Mission Is To Glorify God.

“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). Jesus said that to glorify God, we let our light shine (Mat. 5:16).

Our Mission Is to Save Others.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son,

and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Mat. 28:18-20)

Our Mission Is To Be faithful Until Death.

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat. 10:22).

A Soldier Must Be Disciplined

Consider the following statements concerning the discipline of a soldier:

When a person joins the military, his first taste of discipline is external. His drill sergeants assume that he has no self-discipline and thus seek to install it; left to his own devices, the soldier, sailor, or airman would be slovenly and too self-absorbed to succeed.

Had the new recruit chosen another life, college or a civilian job, his time away from the classroom or the shop would have been his own. He could have decided on his own when to get up, when to study and what to do after hours. No one would have spoken to him about the shine on his shoes and the length of his hair.

This is not to say that the young civilian would not find discipline in his life. He would also be growing as a person and

realizing that he must please his boss or his teacher if he ever wanted to succeed. However, his path to maturity can be slower. The military man has gone into a demanding profession. His country depends on him for its very survival. He is going to be asked to risk or give his life for his fellow soldiers and for the nation. He has to grow up fast and be ready to do things that lesser men cannot.

So his first days in the military aren't pleasant ones. Discipline must be ground into him. He has to gain physical strength, endurance, knowledge, and spirit quickly. Day by day, morning and night, he is pushed to do more than he thinks he can. He is forced to stand tall and look sharp. He must run everywhere and never give an excuse for failure.

At first he is forced to do these things. He is watched, yelled at, and punished for every infraction. Bit by bit, though, he starts to internalize the code of the military. He starts to care if his fellow soldiers succeed or not. He starts to care about the military code. He stands tall, not because someone has told him to, but because of the pride inside him. He is fit and ready for the hard life ahead of him. He knows, first of all, the value of organization. He can put things into perspective. He sees that the impossible project is only a series of little tasks.

He realizes the importance of following through on a task and following up on the people assigned to it. He knows that the self-discipline that rests in his breast may not be present in his non-military team mates. He is ready to lead by example or push from behind. Whatever the moment requires, he can do. He is not afraid to praise or to punish. As the job nears completion, he sees that same spirit of comradeship and pride beginning to grow the same way it did for him when the military taught him all about self-discipline. (Anthony)

What type of discipline is needed for a soldier in the Lord's army?

Run With Patience.

A child of God must understand that he is in this for the long-haul. It is not simply a sprint to the finish line. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Have The Mindset To Grow.

The Apostle Peter wrote,

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to

godliness brotherly kindness; and to
brotherly kindness charity. (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

Dear Christian, are you growing? If you have been a Christian for 20 years or more, are you still growing? It takes discipline to continue to grow.

Endure To The End.

The parents of this writer always taught him, “If you start something finish it.” It takes discipline not to give up. The Apostle Paul wrote, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). As Paul’s life came to a close, he wrote the following words to Timothy,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

Have you fought a good fight? Are you continuing to fight? Or have you already laid your armor down? When one enlists in the Lord’s army, he is going to fight till the very end, even if it means losing his life for the cause of Christ. Jesus said,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be

tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. (Rev. 2:10)

In order to receive the crown, one must have discipline.

A Soldier Must Count The Cost

What things does a potential soldier need to consider before he enlists? It all depends on what he is going to do. Numerous physical demands are placed on the soldier as he goes through his training. In addition to physical demands, one must be prepared for the toll it takes upon a person mentally. One suggestion may be to sit down with someone who is serving or who has served and talk with him.

What things should we consider before we enlist in the Lord's army? In Luke 14, Jesus offered up three things for a person to consider before they follow Him.

A Price To Pay

The first price is to hate my family. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The second price is to bear my cross. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The Apostle Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The third price to consider is to forsake all. "And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him" (Luke 5:11). For some, the cost is too high.

A Plan To Consider

Jesus encouraged them to consider the cost of a building.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28-30)

In addition, Jesus insisted that we consider the cost of battle.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:31-32)

A Problem To Avoid

One should never lose his savor. “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:34-35).

Conclusion

In order for one to be a soldier in the Lord’s army, an enlistment must take place which involves meeting certain

requirements. Have you met those requirements? In addition to meeting those necessary requirements, it is imperative that one submits to his commander, understands the mission, maintains the discipline that is needed, and counts the cost.

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Fear: The Great Enemy Of Soldiers

Don Blackwell



Don Blackwell was born in Charleston, South Carolina. He grew up attending the North Charleston Church of Christ where he obeyed the gospel in 1983. In 1991, he married Sheri Shepard. Don and Sheri have three children, Macy (married to Lee Roland), Lauren, and Brandon. Don is a veteran of the United Air Force where he worked in AF Intelligence as an Imagery Interpreter. In 1994, he separated from active duty military service and moved to Memphis, Tennessee, to attend the Memphis School of Preaching. Since his graduation (1996), he has done local work in Bankston, Alabama; Statesville, North Carolina; and North Charleston, South Carolina. Don holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from Southern Christian University and a Master of Arts from Liberty University. He has made overseas mission trips to Australia, Germany, Africa, and India. Currently Don is the Executive Director of the Gospel Broadcasting Network and preaches for the Southaven Church of Christ. He also serves on the board of directors for World Video Bible School and hosts the video series *The Truth About*. He is the author of the book, *The Truth About Moral Issues*.

It's 2 a.m. on the Navy destroyer USS Trayer, and the air is thick with the smell of fuel and 350 sweaty recruits who have been working too many hours. It's another long, monotonous shift of routine maintenance when, suddenly, the night is ripped open by the piercing

wail of an emergency alarm. The Trayer is under attack. Explosions rock the ship as fires burn and the anguished cries of the injured fill the air. To escape the flames, the flooding, and the thick smoke, the men and women of the crew scramble through mangled compartments past gruesomely torn bodies. Lights flicker, turbines whine, metal rips, and the relentless scream of the alarm tells everyone what they already know: This is war. Except it's not. (Beres)

Reader's Digest explains that the USS Trayer is a training vessel inside of a 90,000-gallon tank at the Navy Recruit Training Command in Illinois. Sometimes called the unluckiest ship in the Navy, the Trayer runs these attack drills on nearly a daily basis. They last for 12 hours and are designed to be realistic, stressful, and terrifying. Dr. Michael Belanger, a Navy senior psychologist, says, "This is supposed to scare the recruits." The article concludes, "It all seems so real, as if it were an actual maritime siege. But it's not. Except for the enemy, that is. The enemy—fear—is real" (Beres). The United States military spends millions of dollars per year to train its soldiers to manage and overcome fear. Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." When soldiers give into fear, battles are lost, missions fail, and people die. Truly, fear is the great enemy of soldiers. This is no less true in the spiritual realm than it is in the physical. The Lord's army has no place for the fearful. God instructed Gideon concerning his army of men, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead" (KJV, Jud. 7:3).

People have many different types of fears. In fact, if one were to look up a list of phobias, he would find a fear of almost everything he can imagine. At least 322 unique phobias have been identified. Some of the top phobias include *brontophobia*—the terror of thunderstorms, *claustrophobia*—the fear of being trapped in a small confined space, and *arachnophobia*—which affects half of all women. There is even the very tragic *homilophobia*, the fear of sermons. In the ultimate scheme of things, being afraid of spiders or tight spaces is not a big deal. The “fear” of our topic is, however, deadly. It is the type of fear mentioned in Revelation 21:8 where the Lord says, “The fearful . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

If asked, what is the biggest problem facing the Lord’s church today? some would likely answer ignorance or apathy or worldliness. While it would be difficult to dispute any of those answers, perhaps fear tops them all. In God’s list of those populating hell in Revelation chapter 21, the apathetic are not mentioned (though we know they will be there). The fearful, however, top the list. Consider that because of fear:

1. Christians do not approach others with the gospel.
2. Men do not serve publicly in worship services.
3. The offended do not go to a brother who has sinned against them.
4. Elders do not rebuke false teachers.
5. Preachers do not preach on controversial topics.
6. Churches do not evangelize, support missionaries, construct buildings, or otherwise spend money.

Consider that the one-talent man was cast into outer darkness, not because he had only one talent, but rather because he was afraid (Mat. 25:25).

Different Usages Of The Word *Fear*

Any discussion of fear from a biblical perspective must begin with the understanding that man can experience two different types of fear, the sense of respect and the sense of terror. *Dictionary.com* defines *fear* as “a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined.” The second definition offered is “reverential awe, especially toward God” (“Fear”). One type of fear is a very uncomfortable emotion associated with dread and terror, while the other is a feeling of reverence and awe at the majesty of God. The essence of the latter is captured in Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is the whole duty of man.” While making the distinction between these points, it is sometimes argued that mankind should only fear God in the first sense (reverential awe), and that he should not be afraid of God. This is not, however, entirely true. The Bible teaches that there is a time and sense in which men should be afraid of God. Consider Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Something beyond reverential awe is under consideration in this passage. Indeed, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Philippians 2:12 commands, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This is a terror that is right and proper and should motivate men to do right. The Apostle John, however, teaches us that “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). While, on the surface, we seem to have a contradiction, the explanation is not difficult. A man who is not living in accordance with God’s law should experience fear of hell (Mat. 10:28). That fear should

motivate him to make corrections in his life (Phi. 2:12). Once a man has obeyed the gospel and is faithfully walking in the light, he should have confidence in his salvation (1 John 5:13). He should experience boldness toward the Day of Judgment (1 John 4:17) because God's love and his compliance with God's law has saved him and removed the terror of God's wrath.

The fear that is our primary consideration in this discussion is, however, fear that would cause one to shirk his spiritual duties. It is that fear the Lord has in mind in Matthew 10:28 when He states that we are not to fear them which can kill the body.

Destructive Nature Of Fear

Fear Exhibits A Lack Of Trust In God.

When the children of Israel came to the border of Promised Land, they sent in spies to spy out the land bring back a report (Num. 13-14). The message they returned with was, It's a great land, flowing with milk and honey. There are grapes and pomegranates and figs. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, said, It's a great land. Let's go take it!

Their reasoning is found in Numbers 14:9: "The Lord is with us: fear them not." The other spies lacked this confidence. They argued, We're not able to go up against these people. They're stronger than we are. And they are giants! We're like grasshoppers standing next to these people, and their walls are super tall. These people will kill us.

Years later, in Deuteronomy 1, Moses rehearsed all of this to the people and said, I told you not to be afraid because God would fight for you. Listen especially to Deuteronomy 1:32: "Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God" (NKJV). The message here is clear: When we let fear stop us from doing the Lord's work, we exhibit a lack of faith and

trust in God. In a modern-day setting, how many elderships exhibit a similar lack of trust when they hoard money in the bank while the saving of souls goes undone because they are **afraid** that the air conditioner might go out or the roof might blow off the building?

Fear Prevents Growth.

This is true on a personal level, but it is also true on a congregational level. On a personal level, some people never grow because of their fear. They never become Bible class teachers. They never develop into leaders. They never become soul-winners. They are always afraid that they might say the wrong thing. The Lord addressed this shortcoming in 1 Peter 3:15. Peter wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” Notice especially the first phrase, “But sanctify the Lord God in your heart.” Immediately before making this statement, Peter listed some things that might intimidate a Christian to shirk his responsibility to share the gospel. Verse 13 mentions people who might harm him (1 Pet. 3:13). Verse 14 discusses suffering that might come as the result of righteousness (1 Pet. 3:14). But after listing the obstacles, Peter encouraged us: Do not be afraid. Do not be troubled. But sanctify God in your heart (1 Pet. 3:13-15). What is Peter’s point? The point is that when a Christian has a proper view of God and His greatness and the fact that He holds his eternal soul in His hands, it will help him to get beyond his fears. A proper place of God in his heart will help the fear to fade away and the work to go forward.

Fear Is Selfish.

This might seem like a strange statement. In what sense is fear selfish? Fear is often what keeps people from stepping outside of their comfort zones. They do not reach

out to others because they are afraid. Few people start out as great leaders. Most grow into it. Most stretch themselves and educate themselves and develop into individuals who become a blessing to others. Fear holds men back from these avenues of service.

Our minds quickly gravitate to Moses. When God first called Moses, he made the same excuses that many of us do today:

1. Who am I that I should do this? (Exo. 3:11).
2. The people are not going to believe me. They are not going to listen to me (Exo. 4:1).
3. I am not an eloquent man. I am not a great speaker (Exo. 4:10).

Remember, too, God's response to Moses' behavior. Exodus 4:14 says that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He communicated to him to Take Aaron, and I will be with you and with him, but **go and do what I told you to do!** It is interesting as one studies the Bible that he never finds God in the excuse-collecting business. If Moses had not gotten beyond his fear, he would never have led the people of God out of Egypt. Fear focuses on self rather than the needs of others.

Fear Brings On The Things That We Fear

Irony is associated with this point. Peter's fear of sinking brought on his sinking. A football player's fear of dropping the pass oftentimes results in him doing that very thing. A pessimist will sometimes cause a negative outcome because of his negativity. An eldership's fear of a project failing may cause them to withhold funds and resources necessary to its success. A Christian's fear that his neighbor will not be interested in a Bible study has frequently prevented him asking for one. In his classic book, *Heart Diseases and Their*

Cure, Wendell Winkler states that “85% of emotional and physical ills of men are brought on by fear.” Earle Nightingale suggests that of the things that people worry about:

1. 40 percent of them never happen.
2. 30 percent are things over and past that cannot be changed.
3. 12 percent is needless worry about our health.
4. 10 percent is petty, miscellaneous worry.
5. Only 8 percent are real, legitimate concerns that are worth expending any effort.

Fear Allows Sin To Spread.

Many times leaders in the Lord’s church have failed to practice church discipline because of fear. Perhaps it was fear of confrontation; it may have been the fear of losing members or the contribution decreasing. These fears have resulted in sin being ignored. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (NKJV, 1 Cor. 5:6). Sin, left unchecked, spreads.

False teachers have not been stopped due to the fear of elderships. Surely courage is qualification of elders. Someone might object, I do not remember reading that in the lists of qualifications in Timothy and Titus, but it is there. In Titus 1, immediately after listing the qualifications of elders, in verse 9 the Bible says about a potential elder,

holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, **whose mouths must be stopped.** (Tit. 1:9-10; emphasis DB)

One of the jobs imperative to the role of an elder is that he must be able to stop the mouths of false teachers. This takes courage! One reason why some false teachers have continued to do so much damage is because leaders in local churches have not had the backbone to stop them.

Fear Feeds Bad Behavior.

Why did Pilate crucify Jesus? He was afraid of the people. He was afraid of an uprising and losing control. Why did Paul have to publicly rebuke Peter to the face in Galatians 2? The immediate answer is because Peter got caught up in racism against the Gentiles. But why? Galatians 2:12 says the reason he behaved the way he did was because he feared the Jews. It was peer pressure. Why do many young people start drinking or smoking? Why do many young ladies have sex before marriage? Oftentimes it is because of the fear of what others might think of them. Fear contributes to bad behavior.

Fear Makes Life Miserable.

One only has to consider the life of King Saul to appreciate this point. His fear of David taking the throne nearly drove Saul mad. His fear of the Philistines drove him to disregard the law of God and seek advice from a medium (1 Sam. 28). Saul's life is a commentary on the destruction fear will bring. The billionaire Howard Hughes spent his life in a dark room alone, paralyzed by his fears. A life spent in fear is a life spent in misery.

Fear Makes One Useless In The Lord's Kingdom.

Before the children of Israel went up to battle the Midianites in Judges 7, God wanted to reduce the size of the army. To accomplish this, He had Gideon go through a series of steps, perhaps the most memorable of which related to how the soldiers drank water. The first step in the elimination process was to remove those who were fearful. In Judges 7:3, God said, "Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the

people, saying, **‘Whoever is fearful and afraid**, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’ And twenty-two thousand of the people returned” (NKJV; emphasis DB). The Lord has no place in His army for cowards.

A preacher once relayed the story of his son who wanted to obey the gospel. The boy told his father, “Tonight, I’m going to come forward to be baptized.” The invitation song was sung, but the boy did not come forward. Afterwards, the boy told his father, “I didn’t come forward tonight because I was afraid.” The father responded, “That’s okay, Son. The Lord has no need of cowards.” The next night the boy marched up front and said, “I want to become a Christian!”

Fear Is Contagious.

Not only does fear damage in all of the ways mentioned above, but it also has another frightening characteristic: its strong tendency to spread. Fear is contagious. We previously mentioned that as Israel came to the border of the Promised Land, they sent in spies, ten of which came back with a terrible report. Their news was, The land is indeed wonderful, but there is no way that was can possibly take it. The inhabitants are giants, and we would face certain defeat (Num. 13:31-33).

It is, however, the next verse that holds particular interest with regard to our present point. Numbers 14:1 says, “And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried; and the people wept that night.” What began with ten men spread to hundreds of thousands of God’s people and they all cried, Defeat. The negativity of one elder can permeate the entire eldership and result in great work not being done.

Fear Destroys The Soul.

Christians seem inclined to dismiss certain characteristics, not considering them as deadly. Some of these include envy, ingratitude, and fear. Oftentimes, it is the issues of the heart that we are inclined to excuse. These,

however, seem to be the worst. They are the root of outward deficiencies. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Mat. 12:34-35).

Cowardice can cause a man to go to hell. Revelation 21:8 contains a list of those who will be cast into the lake of fire. The fearful top the list. The one-talent man of Matthew 25 was cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The reason? He said, “I was **afraid** and went and hid your talent in the ground” (NKJV, Mat. 25:25; emphasis DB). Men commit overt acts of sin because of fear (peer pressure). The Apostle Peter fell into this trap in Galatians 2. Teenagers are particularly susceptible to this. Men commit sins of omission due to fear. We fail to teach the gospel, serve the Lord, and practice the Golden Rule because of fear. Because of fear, Christians do not rebuke a brother who sins against them (Luke 17:3-4), restore those who are overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1), do good unto all men (Gal. 6:10), carry out the Great Commission (Mat. 28:19-20), give an answer for the hope that is within them (1 Pet. 3:15), mark them that cause divisions and offenses (Rom. 16:17), stop the mouths of the false teachers (Tit. 1:9), withdraw from the unfaithful (1 Cor. 5:5), avoid fellowshiping those withdrawn from (1 Cor. 5:11), let their light shine before men (Mat. 5:16), confess Christ before men (Mat. 10:32-33), or keep themselves unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:27). The list goes on and on. It is easy to see why the fearful top the list of those in Hell.

Defeating Fear

All of the material mentioned thus far is useless unless one also knows how to overcome fear. If a man wants to have

meekness, he will likely study Moses. If seeking patience, a study of Job is in order. If a person is desirous of courage, who better to study than David? In 1 Samuel 17, the army of God was paralyzed with fear. They were facing their archenemies, the Philistines. Each day the champion of the Philistines would come out and mock Israel. His name was Goliath. Most commentators estimate that he was 9 feet 9 inches tall. He was decked out in body armor that weighed 125 pounds and was armed with a javelin and a spear. Twice a day, Goliath would taunt God's people, saying, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together" (1 Sam. 17:10). The soldiers of Israel were terrified. Verse 11 says they were "dismayed and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11). Eighty times (twice a day for forty days), Goliath blasphemed and taunted.

On a particular day, a shepherd named David arrived at the encampment of Israel. He had left the keeping of the sheep to bring food and to check on his brothers. Goliath came out as before and extended his challenge to God's army. The rest of the story is probably one of the best known in the Bible. David courageously stepped up, challenged Goliath, beat him, and won a great victory for Israel. Let us now draw strength from David.

David's Demonstration Of Courage

How did David have such courage when every other man in Israel was stricken with fear? If we can glean the answer to this question, we will have a powerful pattern to help us overcome fear.

David Drew On God's Past Faithfulness.

King Saul tried to insist that David would fail. He tried to instill in him the fear that the rest of the army was experiencing. How did David respond? David said to Saul,

Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. (1 Sam. 17:34-35)

Verse 37 continues the thought, "David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37).

David drew courage and confidence from God's past behavior. Jehovah had delivered David and shown His power in the past. Is this not also true for us? As we ponder the rich blessings in our lives, can we not take confidence in the fact that God has shown great care for us? Consider also God's faithfulness toward the heroes of Scripture. In Hebrews 12, immediately after rehearsing the great champions of faith in Hebrews 11, we are told, "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). What is the lesson for us? Draw from them and their successes and how God worked in their lives and press on to overcome. Why should I be afraid to tackle a certain task? My God is the same God who allowed David to defeat Goliath. I draw on God's past faithfulness.

David Did Not Let Pressure From Others Stop Him.

When David arrived at the encampment of Israel on day 40, he heard the giant come out to do his daily ranting. David asked, "Who is this man that he should defy the armies of the

living God?” (1 Sam. 17:26). Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him and became enraged. He lashed out against David, Who is watching the sheep? Get back to the sheep! I know your heart. You’re conceited and wicked. You’re just here to watch the battle. Go home, little brother (1 Sam. 17:28).

His words were very belittling toward David, and Eliab was a warrior. David was merely a shepherd boy. One could easily see how such words could cause a man to quit.

Sometimes it is comments exactly like this that keep God’s people today from launching out in the service of the Lord. Notice particularly that this is David’s family. Sometimes those closest to us will insult and instill fear and attempt to get us to quit. Many times, elders have been ready to take on a task until they went home and their wives talked them down and they became afraid to try it. Perhaps David’s standing up to his brother was a greater exhibition of courage than was standing up to Goliath.

King Saul heard about David’s courage after being bullied by his brother, and Saul sent for David. David then told Saul that he would fight the Philistine. Saul’s response was, You cannot go fight him; you are just a kid (1 Sam. 17:33). As David went before Goliath, the insults intensified. First Samuel 17:42 says that the giant “disdained him” and “cursed David by his gods.” How does one deal with such discouraging remarks from family, degrading remarks from the king, and denigrating remarks from the enemy? David looked beyond them. Pressure from others did not stop him. ***David Saw God, Not Goliath.***

We do not mean that he did not see him at all. Of course he saw him. Our point is perspective. Sometimes that is our problem: we need to change our perspective. Everyone else thought Goliath was too big to hit. David thought he was too big to miss. When most of the soldiers saw Goliath standing

and hurling insults, they were intimidated by his words, his size, his strength, and his armor. That is all they saw. It is very interesting that the soldiers of Israel did not even mention God. All they saw was Goliath. David's perspective was different. If you count the number of times that David made a statement about Goliath, you will find only two. Contrast this with the number of times that he mentions God in 1 Samuel 17:

Verse 26—"The armies of the living God."

Verse 36—"The armies of the living God."

Verse 45—"The Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel."

Verse 46—"The Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

Verse 47—"The LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands."

In total, David refers to God **nine** times in this passage, compared to only **two** times for Goliath. We would go a long way toward overcoming fear if our thoughts of God outnumbered our thoughts of Goliath 4 to 1.

Though not specifically mentioned in the fight against Goliath, we know that David was a man who constantly prayed to God. One needs only to read the Psalms to be deeply impressed by this fact. Constant prayer to the Father helps to eliminate fear. As the great leader Nehemiah was questioned by the heathen king, Artaxerxes, Nehemiah said, "I was very sore afraid" (Neh. 2:2). How did he handle his fear? Nehemiah 4:4-5 says, "So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king." Nehemiah faced his fear with prayer. Like David, Nehemiah saw God, not the opposition. Romans 8:31 exhorts, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

David Did Not Procrastinate.

Notice that verse 48 says that David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine (1 Sam. 17:48). Our point is not that we be reckless or thoughtless. It is, however, true that sometimes:

1. We can analyze things to the point that we scare ourselves to death.
2. We find every pitfall and every remotely possible tragedy and we become frozen in fear.
3. Congregations do not grow because when an evangelism idea is put forth, members will come up with so many possible problems that they do nothing.

Constant analyzing and discussing can result in nothing ever getting done. David knew what needed to be done. He had a plan, and he executed it. He chose what he was familiar with—his staff and his sling. He then found five smooth stones, and he went off to do the work of the Lord.

Conclusion

The United States military spends millions of dollars a year training soldiers to face and overcome fear. They understand that failure to do so will result in failed missions and loss of life. Fear in the Lord’s army has an even heavier consequence—eternity in hell. God’s army has no room for cowards. “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (NKJV, 1 Cor. 16:13).

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Our Enemy, The Devil

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December 7, 1941, began no different than hundreds of Sunday mornings on the beautiful island of Oahu in Hawaii. The island, better known as Pearl Harbor, was the headquarters of the US Pacific fleet. However, this day was quickly changed when Japanese dive bombers suddenly appeared over the base at about 7:55 a.m. A wave of over 200 aircraft from the Japanese imperial forces made a sneak attack which all but destroyed most of the American fleet harbored there. President Roosevelt, in his famous speech before Congress, identified the enemy while an injured and anxious nation listened.

Even today, the date December 7, 1941, still lives in infamy. The United States of America “was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan. . . . No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their

righteous might will win through to absolute victory.” What a day that was over 70 years ago.

Those who live and remember that war know that it took a heroic and unified effort from the United States and her allies to defeat such a crafty, determined, and innovative enemy. Japan had broken all the rules, violated the peace, and attacked without military provocation. They, therefore, had proven that they would be a formidable and relentless enemy.

What Is An Enemy?

The word *enemy* is often used in this Post 911 world and it is well understood. We, in our lifetime, have endured our own generation’s deadly sneak attack. The coordinated attacks on America on September 11, 2001, gave a new and sinister meaning of the word *enemy* to a generation relatively untouched by previous wars and adversaries.

An **enemy** according to various sources is an opponent, an adversary, a foe who is involved in active combatant and antagonistic activities against another. An **enemy** is hostile and wishes to inflict harm, as much harm as possible, in order to achieve its goals and objectives.

When Peter styled the devil as a roaring lion, he was briefing the servants of God of the furiousness and viciousness on their declared enemy (KJV, 1 Pet. 5:8). The devil is filled with rage and hate for mankind and thus will stop at nothing to destroy each of us. His unbridled malice has overtaken many who are not watching (Gal. 6:1).

The Enemy Is A Beast

Like a hungry, wild beast, the devil is hunting you with relentless vigor; he waits to devour you. In this context (1 Pet. 5:8), the word “devour” is “to swallow, or to drink down.” Our Lord and commander was clear and to the point about

the devil's malice: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

According to Jesus, the devil, our enemy, is the greatest "mass murderer" of all time. Every human being since Adam has fallen prey to the results of the first and most diabolical lie ever told, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). At the strike of the beast, all now die. Our physical deaths are the result of an enemy's deception and malice.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.).
(Rom. 5:12-14)

The Edenic origin of sin is a direct result of disobedience. The type of seductive disobedience that the enemy plans for all of us—our pain, suffering, misery, personal loss, and ultimate eternal destruction—does not deter the Devil. As a matter of fact, the more we suffer, the better he likes it. For he was not satisfied till all Job and his wife had and loved had been devoured. The enemy was persistent in his personal attacks, till the man was afflicted over his entire body (Job 1-3). The suffering brought upon this good man was awful, but his trust in God overcame his fear of the enemy.

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. (Job 1:21-22)

John, in 1 John 3:8, informs us that our enemy, the devil, was also the first sinner. Thus, if the enemy was so deranged as to contend with God the Creator, he will have absolutely no hesitation with contending with us the creation. We are, therefore, instructed to prove all things (1 The 5:21) and to let no man deceive us by any means (2 The. 2:3-4; Eph. 5:6).

Jesus even warned that the enemy would employ “false Christs, and false prophets” (Mat. 24:24). In that admonition, he notes that without vigilance even the “very elect” would be deceived, or devoured, by the Beast. Jesus even used another dangerous beast—the wolf—to describe those who come with the enemies’ lies; “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7:15).

An enemy must use deception to achieve his goals. Jesus said, like the Japanese did in 1941, they masquerade as harmless, while the harm is already devised. They play a role contrary to their actual character and intent. However, the Lord still deploys us in the middle of these dangerous enemies, “Go your ways, behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3).

The Enemy Is The Devil

Peter’s first epistle is a monument to the elder apostle’s strong character and sacrificial commitment to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He, like many of his brethren, had

faltered and neglected their duty on several occasions, including the time of the Lord's trials and execution, but the twelve had all stood firm after Pentecost. Peter's tenacity and boldness was often the encouragement the embattled church needed to remain faithful in such a terrible time of temptation and persecution:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:7)

Within these assuring words, Peter gives us a retrospective glimpse into the lives of Christians who lived in those turbulent times. They were people, just as we are, simply wanting to live their lives in peace as Christians. But this was denied them by ruthless politicians and greedy and selfish religious leaders; reminds us of our times, does it not? However, Peter's letter was to remind God's people that they served the Lord, not **Nero**, and it was the Lord who would ultimately care for them and give them victory over the enemy.

And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. (1 Pet. 3:13-14)

In the midst of the devil's continued attacks, Peter's message was grace to the ears of weary Christians. While

they faced escalating trials and heartbreaking mistreatment from their combatant adversaries, Peter still wanted them to endure these trials and not be tempted to allow a hostile world to force them to apostasy, hate, or indifference. They were to depend on the “righteous might of our Lord Jesus.”

Peter knew that the enemy would soon have him martyred and wanted the church to focus on being righteous, obedient, and Christ-like. In spite of the devil’s attacks, they should always stand and be faithful even under this duress, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).

You Face An Enemy With Strength

Peter encourages God’s people to be strong-willed because they must overcome an even greater adversary than Nero; they must overcome the devil. The epistle therefore directs Christians to an inevitable conclusion: You will suffer on earth because you have a ruthless, blood-thirsty, and relentless enemy who is hoping that you take your eyes off God. Peter named and described their enemy: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Your adversary or opponent, the devil, is always prowling to take advantage of your every mistake and misstep. This is why he is called a roaring lion. He is searching for those who fail to keep up, who stray from the flock, those who are not **watching**, or not obeying the shepherd. When Paul wrote to the brethren at Ephesus concerning their new life in Christ Jesus, he admonished them to continual vigilance when sin seemed the easier course, “Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27).

Paul went through a number of **sins** that were in their past and warned that if the enemy sees an opportunity, he will pounce and take them back to sin. When Peter urged the church to be “vigilant” (1 Pet. 5:8), he knew that the enemy attempts to make us weary, tired, and worn out through constant trials and struggles. Therefore, **vigilance** is keeping **alert** and **awake** even when you are beyond **ability** to **endure**. For this same reason, Paul admonished the church in the Galatian region to “not be weary in well doing” (Gal. 6:9). They were not to become overwhelmed by the devil’s repeated attacks. Consider James’ admonition, “Submit yourselves therefore unto God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam. 4:7).

But he’s coming back, as my father used to say. Therefore, Paul recommends the Christian armour so that the repeated attacks can be withstood,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph. 6:10-13)

Note that to “withstand” is to make the “stand” over and over and never falter. To Corinth, Paul commanded, “Be ye

steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Even When You Are Not Watching Your Enemy, Your Enemy Is Watching You

In 1941, while American and Japanese officials were sitting at the table discussing boundaries, China, trade, and the war in Europe, Japanese planes were already leaving aircraft carriers to attack Pearl Harbor. The enemy knew exactly what ships were harbored there and how many planes were lined up on the runway, and they also knew that the American forces were not ready to protect themselves. The attack was vicious, conclusive, and merciless.

Someone wrote that “Eternal Vigilance is the **price of freedom.**” How true, but also consider that vigilance is required in our salvation. Peter was very clear when he spoke to his brethren, The Devil must be watched because he is **watching you**. Like a prowling ravenous predator, he is watching, desiring to eat you alive without mercy (1 Pet. 5:8).

Peter therefore called for **dedicated** service from God’s warriors, warning them that they have to prepare their minds to face an enemy whose intention is to catch them off guard and vulnerable: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).

Victory over the enemy’s tactics requires personal discipline to temper outward commitment to duty. There is no time the Christian should not be aware of the enemy’s presence and influence. When the apostle Paul wrote to the brethren at Thessalonica, the devil was attacking on several fronts. He was confusing them about the Lord’s return;

he was convincing some that faithfulness was futile. Many others had taken their eyes off their commander and were being overcome by immorality. Paul therefore called them back to vigilance and duty. They were not to spend time worrying about the Lord's return but serve till He does return, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 The. 5:6).

To be sober (Greek *nephontes*) means that a soldier of the Lord is not to become intoxicated with the lust of the world to the detriment of the Lord's cause. The servant of the Lord has been changed according to His calling; **he became a soldier of the Cross:**

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. (1 Pet. 1:14-15)

Our conduct is to reflect our training, fully aware that the enemy is watching for a weak moment to strike,

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. (Rom. 13: 11-12)

The term "sleep" in this passage denotes a failure to **watch**, becoming indifferent to the requirements of service, and not being on your job. There is no better example of an

enemy's tactics and behavior than from our Lord Himself. In His parabolic teachings, Jesus clearly described how an enemy seeks to do harm,

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. (Mat. 13: 4-25)

In this parable, the unsuspecting farmer had been compromised "while his men **slept**." Because his workers did not watch and do their jobs, his entire enterprise was **compromised**. Even more damaging was the fact that he did not know he had been attacked till irreparable damage was done. Many Christians fall prey to the "roaring lion" because they are not on their jobs. They have been distracted and rocked to sleep in mediocrity. Soldiers who murmur, gripe, and complain are often derelict of their duty. Therefore, to avoid indifference and mediocrity, Paul urged the brethren at Philippi to follow their commander and to take on the mind of Christ (Phi. 2:4-5). If so, they would work out their "own salvation in fear and trembling" (Phi. 2:12).

When You Face The Enemy, Depend On God

In the midst of such stress and persecution, it is sobering that Peter gave a strong and insistent admonition of humility and submission to God. Most would believe that this would be the optimum opportunity to teach **endurance** and faithfulness. Instead, the elder apostle reminded his brethren that humility and trust are the foundation of loyalty and service. Before Peter named the enemy, the devil, he

named their protector, God. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

The devil’s attacks and encroachment are sure, but he has no effect on those who hide with their mighty God. Think about it, Christians: God has **never** promised to move our troubles, but He has promised to uphold and give victory to those who place their **trust** in him. James’ epistle, often called “The Gospel of Common Sense,” also teaches this same lesson of submission even in the face of overwhelming tests and troubles and attacks of the adversary,

Submit yourselves therefore to God.
Resist the devil, and he will flee from
you. Draw nigh to God, and he will
draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands,
ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye
double minded. (Jam. 4:7-8)

James, like Peter, admonished us to be influenced by the “greater grace” (*meizona*) which fortifies us in the face of the world’s influence and leads us to **endurance**. The apostles all knew from personal experience how easy it is to lose perspective and depend on one’s own **power, will,** and **understanding**. The apostle Paul, who was in a sense the poster child of “Lost Perspective,” urged the leaders of the church at Ephesus not to be enslaved by earthly desires. He knew that unless Christians were able to overcome the temptation to become “fleshly” and **base** in their response to trials, the devil would ultimately defeat them. Their enemy would thus consume them in a mindset that requires **survival at all cost**. They replace their dependence

on God with a type of “situation ethics.” The enemy therefore wins because the “old man” reemerges with a renewed vigor and quickly replaces the new man. Consequently, all that was gained through Christ is now lost. The devil, not the Lord, then becomes the dominant influence in that person’s life:

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. (Eph. 4:22-27)

Paul warned that to revert to a mindset that excludes being Christlike makes you an embarrassment to the very profession you have made:

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame to even speak of those things which are done of them in secret. (Eph. 5:11-12)

Christians must always be aware of the devil’s tactics. We are urged not to reason that it is **sensible** and **prudent**

to “go along, to get along.” The enemy tempts us to “cope by compromise” knowing full well that it renders us tainted and useless to the Lord’s cause. When a Christian decides to turn from humble service to God to indulge in the world’s pleasures, he **aids** and **abets** his own enemy. Peter’s desire was that the people of God’s remain distinguishable from the world:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

“Defection”—Selling Out

The enemy is always in search of defectors, those who will renounce or ignore their allegiance to Christ to work in his (Satan’s) favor. The devil’s tactic is to go after those with weak or faltering faith in hopes they will abandon their duty to and become a traitor to the faith. Benedict Arnold was a general in the American Continental Army during the Revolutionary War in 1780. After being given command of West Point, he planned to surrender to the British Army. When his plan was exposed, he defected and received a commission within the British Army. Regardless of his reasons and explanation, his name is forever associated in our history as that of a “traitor.” To be called a **“Benedict Arnold”** is not a compliment.

Trials, temptations, and troubles are difficult in any generation. When these difficulties are in response to the

profession of our faith, that is an even greater internal battle. Our enemy, the devil, is constantly watching us during hard times to monitor when we may have reached our level of endurance and are ready to “sell out,” defect, and become a traitor to our faith. Our brother Paul urged all of us Christians to fortify ourselves in the “whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:11). According to Paul, the enemy is on the prowl devising new schemes, lies, and distractions to pull us away from God. Paul calls this “the wiles of the Devil.”

Remember, the Devil has no authority over you. He is a liar and a usurper; he cannot force you to do anything. He can only distract you from God’s service, in hopes that you sell out to serve him. We know that the Devil is a liar who desires and offers that which does not belong to him. To accept what the world has to offer is to accept lies and empty promises which have no gain or profit. Christ in his Earthly ministry asked a simple question that makes us examine and think on this matter of selling out.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:35-37)

What a sobering thought: what is the price of my sell-out to the enemy? What can the enemy offer to entice defection? What in **this world** is worth us “changing sides”? Make no mistake about it; you cannot serve two masters (Mat. 6:24); you must decide who holds your devotion. When Paul spoke to the brethren at Rome, he was fully aware that some

were being tempted to commit spiritual treason. Therefore, he warned them against believing they could serve the devil and Christ at the same time. They were to understand that their actions and decisions determined in whose army they served.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Rom. 6:16-18)

Paul admonished that surrender was, in fact, **defection**. And that as an obedient soldier of the **devil**, you are a **traitor** to the cause of Christ.

Faithful Unto Death

In 1865, Edward John Poyner painted a picture that was destined to become one of the most famous paintings of that era. It was the image of a **lone soldier** standing at his post during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The painting was inspired by the discovery of the skeleton of a Roman soldier still in full armor, during the excavation of Pompeii in the early 19th century. It is believed that while others ran at the sight of sure and impending **death**, this lone soldier remained loyal to his duty and devoted to his oath.

The relevance of the aforementioned image is that it captures beautifully the devotion displayed by our early Christian brethren. They, of course, did not face the hot **lava** spewed by an erupting volcano, but the hot **indignation** and **hatred** spewed from an **erupting evil**, inspired by our enemy, the **devil**. They could have abandoned their post, which would have meant abandoning their Lord, but they stood. Knowing that their lives were in jeopardy, they still stood unflinching with the Savior who stood unflinching for them. However, unlike that soldier in Pompeii who could only be brave in the face of **doom**, Christians were brave in the face of **victory**.

John was exiled on the island of Patmos for remaining loyal to the Lord and faithful to the gospel. There the Lord gave the decree of victory that was to encourage all Christians for all time to be “faithful unto death.” John was told by vision to write what he saw and send it to the seven churches of Roman Asia Minor (Rev. 1:9-11).

The Lord made it clear and evident that our enemy, the devil, was soundly defeated and this victory is **possessed** by not being overcome by this brief persecution. The church at Smyrna was given the message that must encourage all of the Lord’s people:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. (Rev. 2:10-11)

Faithful unto death at that time (AD 96) did not give the image of a long life or even sickness where you are well cared for till your last breath. No, it meant you were to stand still, often looking your **executioner** in the eye while he prepared to take your life. Jesus commanded John to inform the church that the victory of heaven is eternal, and that the duration of their persecution and suffering would be brief. The Lord gave this same admonition to the disciples during his Earthly ministry. When Jesus came to the Mount of Olives, where He often went to teach and pray, He taught them of faithfulness,

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. (Mat. 24:9-13)

Conclusion

We as Christians, therefore, must face a determined and devious enemy without acceptance of compromise. As earlier stated, there is no common union between light and darkness. As the war with Germany and Japan waged on, President Roosevelt made a power statement in his State of the Union speech, January 6, 1942:

Our enemies are guided by brutal cynicism, by unholy contempt for the

human race. We are inspired by a faith that goes back through all the years to the first Book of Genesis: ‘God created man in his own image’. We on our side are striving to be true to that divine heritage. We are fighting, as our fathers fought, to uphold the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God. Those on the other side are striving to destroy this deep belief and to create a world in their own image—a world of tyranny and cruelty and serfdom.

This is the conflict that day and night pervades our lives. No compromise can end that conflict. There never has been—there never can be—successful compromise between good and evil.

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The Soldier's Handbook: The Inspired Word

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Living the Christian life necessitates being on the front line of battle every day, waging war against the relentless enemy known as the devil. The apostle Peter said, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (KJV, 1 Pet. 5:8). Going all the way back to the Garden of Eden, the devil declared war on the human family and has never let up. He is bent on the destruction of God’s creation (Rev. 12:9). In order to navigate our way through the battlefield of life successfully, we must keep the soldier’s handbook, which is the inspired Word of God, in hand.

The Soldier’s Handbook Directs

The source of the soldier’s handbook is Almighty God. He has given us His inspired Word to equip us effectively

for the battles of life. Paul wrote, “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, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter corroborates what Paul said about inspiration in these words, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Both Paul and Peter reveal the Divine source of the soldier’s handbook, and it is not the product of mankind, but Deity.

The revelation of the mind of God is found in the sixty-six books that make up the Bible. The benefit of the Old Testament to soldiers today is that we can learn from the past. The apostle Paul said concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The twenty-seven books of the New Testament govern us today. King Jesus legislates the behavior of His army through the Word (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:3-5). It is His last will and testament (Heb. 9:15-17). All authority has been entrusted to Him, and God the Father said we are to “hear . . . him” (Mat. 28:18; Mat. 17:5).

The soldier’s handbook requires diligent study and meditation (Psa. 1:2; Psa. 119:97; 2 Tim. 2:15). Despite the claims of some, we can understand the Scriptures. The apostle Paul said that he received revelation from God and “wrote . . . in few words” (Eph. 3:3). Why? Here is the answer, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4). He also encouraged the saints in Ephesus with these words, “Wherefore be ye not

unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). Regarding the ability to comprehend the Scriptures, Jesus Himself said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

The sufficiency of the soldier’s handbook is reflected in the fact that God “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). During the Earthly ministry of Jesus, He told the apostles, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit guided or superintended the men who penned the New Testament (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The irresistible conclusion is that God has given us everything necessary to live a complete life in Christ. The canon of Scripture is closed and no revelation is forthcoming. Jude summed it up in these words, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

The body of truth that has been given to us contains “exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4). Three observations are in order related to this passage. Number one, certain facts must be believed. For example, we must believe that Jesus is the Divine Son of God. The Lord affirmed, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Number two, divine commands must be obeyed. Again, by way of example, on the day of Pentecost, Peter instructed, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Number three, promises are to be enjoyed. When we believe and obey the commands of Scripture, we will then reap the promises outlined by God in the Bible. Among those promises are

pardon from sin (Acts 22:16), peace with God (Rom. 5:1-2), the privilege of prayer (1 Pet. 3:12), the presence of God (Heb. 13:5-6), and eternal life (Tit. 1:2; John 14:1-3).

Centuries ago, Jeremiah the prophet said, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Hence, God has provided us with the all-sufficient Scriptures to guide us from the womb to the tomb. The Psalmist acknowledged the guiding light of God’s Word when he penned, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105).

The Soldier’s Handbook Corrects

Another chapter in the soldier’s handbook is that it ably corrects us if we are out of step with Commander Jesus. The apostle Paul emphasized with clarity this fact when he wrote the inspired Scriptures are “profitable . . . for correction” (2 Tim. 3:16). God’s Word stipulates the parameters of behavior for every engagement in the army of Christ. It serves as a critic on our words and deeds. The Hebrew writer underscored this idea when he said,

The word of God is quick, and powerful,
and sharper than any twoedged sword,
piercing even to the dividing asunder
of soul and spirit, and of the joints and
marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts
and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

Criticism comes in two forms, positive and negative. While many of us do not like any form of criticism, it can be productive if it helps us please Him who enlisted us as “a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).

The soldier's handbook issues warnings about the dangers and allurements that are in the world. Paul cautioned the saints in Rome about being "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). The elements and influences of the world can mold and remake us in an image unbecoming of a saint. We jeopardize our relationship with the Lord when we become enamored with the world and all of its trappings. James said, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4). The apostle John also sounded warnings about the world in these powerful words,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.
(1 John 2:15-17)

According to the soldier's handbook, the danger associated with hooking our wagon to the world is that we are aligning ourselves with a way of life that is temporal and fading away.

One of the by-products of the world is that it robs us of putting the Lord first in our lives. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mat. 6:33). In far too many congregations, worship and work in the kingdom become

secondary to worldly interests and passions. It is amazing that every fall, zealous fans will not think a thing about attending a football game in frigid temperatures, along with rain, sleet, and snow. Why will fans support a team in those extreme conditions? The answer is, it is their passion. Sadly, in the lives of many saints, this same burning passion does not translate into the spiritual realm. The soldier's handbook reads, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). In this context, Paul speaks of Christ as "our life" (Col. 3:4). Is it not the case the Lord desires to be the hub or focal point in the lives of His people?

Another important aspect of the soldier's handbook is that it can be used to correct any and every false doctrine that arises. The apostle Paul counseled, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 The. 5:21). This word of caution implies some things are not good. The standard by which we discern truth and error, right and wrong, good or bad is the timeless Word of God. John wrote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). How are we to try or test the "spirits" or teachers? The answer is the soldier's handbook. Centuries ago the Bereans demonstrated a spirit that ought to be present today. Luke said that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Think about it: Paul was an inspired apostle, but they checked out what he said with the Bible!

The soldier's handbook is also necessary in our fight for the sanctity of human life. The Bible teaches that human life begins at conception and that every soul is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:14). Since 1973, over 58 million abortions have been performed in America. Does it not seem hypocritical for Americans to bemoan the atrocities that

took place under the evil regime of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany and then uphold the murder of innocent babies? The soldier's handbook still informs us that God hates the "hands that shed innocent blood" (Pro. 6:16-17).

In our fight and quest for upholding moral values, we need to lift up the soldier's handbook regarding the biblical definition of marriage. Same-sex marriage is now legal in the United States of America. While the laws of the land now sanction the union of same-sex couples, the soldier's handbook still defines marriage between a man and woman (Mat. 19:3-6). By way of a side note, God's design for marriage has always been one man and one woman for life (Mat. 19:4-6).

The soldier's handbook is also necessary to show that all people are precious in the eyes of the Creator. Our world is filled with too much hate and prejudice. The answer to hate and prejudice comes right out of the soldier's handbook and informs us that God has "made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). God is color blind, and His people should be, too!

The Soldier's Handbook Protects

Keeping the soldier's handbook in hand is necessary because it provides a safety net of protection in our fight with the devil. The devil is relentless in his pursuit and destruction of those of us who belong to the human family. In light of the deceptive and relentless work of the devil, Paul counseled, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:10-11). The soldier's handbook forewarns us of the deceptive

practices and schemes of the devil, so we can be forearmed for battle (2 Cor. 2:11).

The Bible records the epic battle between the devil and Jesus in the wilderness. In each of the three temptations recorded by Matthew, Jesus responded with Scripture stating, “It is written” (Mat. 4:4; Mat. 4:7; Mat. 4:10). The Lord Jesus understood the power of Scripture and employed it as a defense mechanism in his fight with the devil. It makes sense the Psalmist would write, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11).

One of the components of Christian armor is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Just as Jesus unsheathed “the sword of the Spirit” and defended Himself from the devil, we must do the same. Far too many soldiers in the Lord’s army never draw their sword but go missing in action. The apostle Paul spoke of Hymenaeus and Alexander suffering “shipwreck” of their faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20). He later spoke of Hymenaeus and Philetus teaching false doctrine and overthrowing “the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17-18). The casualties of war stemming from the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus could have been prevented had they employed the soldier’s handbook, “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17).

The other components of the Christian armor described in detail by Paul are useless if they are never utilized. Can you imagine a Roman soldier never wearing a breastplate or helmet? Could he have gone toe-to-toe with the enemy and maintained his traction without having his feet shod with hobnail boots? What if he never picked up his shield? What would have been the odds in battle without these instruments of war? By the same token, how can we expect to win the war against the devil if are not properly equipped for battle (Eph. 6:10-17)?

The soldier's handbook provides further protection by reminding us the battle can be won if we stay true to the Lord. One of the greatest tools of the devil is discouragement. He knows discouragement can lead to a defeatist attitude. How many times have Christian soldiers thrown up their hands and quit the faith because of the trials and temptations of life? In the book of Hebrews, the writer encouraged saints who had either gone back to Judaism or were on the verge of doing so to look back at the great people of God who persevered despite numerous obstacles (Heb. 12:1). He then cited the persevering spirit of Jesus and His triumphant work on the cross (Heb. 12:2). The writer then made this profound statement, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (NKJV, Heb. 12:3). According to the inspired penman, the Hebrew Christians were in danger of becoming discouraged. Imagine that.

Despite the tendency and danger of discouragement, we can prevail with the Lord's help and His protective handbook, the Bible. When King David faced trials and difficult times, he turned to God for His protective care and solace. He penned these words under the weight of severe trial, "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear, what can flesh do to me? . . . This I know, because God is for me" (NKJV, Psa. 56:3-4; Psa. 56:9)? David would later write in the throes of adversity, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by" (NKJV, Psa. 57:1). Again, as Paul said, the Old Testament Scriptures "were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). What a blessing it is to read and reflect on the

lives of some of God's greatest servants and be reminded just as He stood by them, He will stand by us. This knowledge protects us from thinking we are the only one to ever experience trial, adversity, discouragement, and temptation. A lot can be said about the preemptive nature of the Bible. God in His infinite wisdom understands the complexities of human life and the tendencies of His creation. The Psalmist said of God, "For He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:14). Therefore, He has given us the soldier's handbook for our protection and safekeeping. In light of these thoughts, it is not hard to imagine why the apostle Paul would echo these words,

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Rom. 11:33-35)

In light of the infinite wisdom and majesty of God, Paul closes with these words, "And of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

Conclusion

It is a blessing and privilege to be a soldier in the Lord's army and fight for His cause. The battle can be won because the Lord is with us and His Divine handbook guides us every step of the way. John the apostle provided a closing word of

encouragement to every faithful soldier when he penned, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

AWOL Soldiers And How To Get Them Back

Greg Dismuke



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Many people who claim to be Christians have no idea what it means. They have a world's view of Christianity that is unlike what is presented for us in Scripture. To give us real perspective on Christianity, the Bible compares it to various things so that we might appreciate the many facets of this lifestyle. How would I define Christianity? Consider several words as we seek to define it.

In communion, *Christianity* means to be a friend of God which is predicated on obedience. Christ showed himself a friend in dying for us. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (KJV, John 15:13). We show our love for him by obeying Him; "Ye are my friends, if do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14).

In character, *Christianity* means to be a saint. A saint refers to one who is separated from the world and set apart to God as pure. Paul said the Corinthians were called (invited) to be saints. Peter revealed that the Christian must be holy in character because the One Who called him is holy,

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because as it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Pet. 1:14-15)

In this world, *Christianity* means to be a foreigner; Peter called the saints strangers (1 Pet. 1:1), because he desired for them to know how to live as strangers and pilgrims. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11).

In conflict, *Christianity* means to be a soldier. Paul wrote,

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

This is the aspect of Christianity on which we will center our thoughts. Our subject is AWOL soldiers and how to get them back. Let us notice three areas for our discussion. First, what constitutes Christian soldiers being AWOL? Second, what causes Christian soldiers to become AWOL? Third, what can we do to get the AWOL soldiers to return?

What Constitutes Being An AWOL Soldier?

The acronym AWOL stands for absent without leave. It means one is not at his assigned post. He is one who has failed to follow through on the commitment he made to those who enlisted him. It is the same concept spiritually. When one does not keep his commitment to the Lord, when he is not at his assigned post, he is AWOL. Every Christian must be at the post assigned by Christ.

A Christian Soldier Is AWOL When He Leaves His Post Of Affliction.

Paul made it abundantly clear to Timothy that those who take up the cause of Christ would suffer in so doing. “Yea, and all that will live godly, shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Following Christ could cost the loss of a good name. It could mean the loss of freedom in imprisonment. It could cause the loss of physical life. Paul knew this better than most and did not shrink when the Holy Spirit revealed it to him.

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing that things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of those things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:22-24)

If we will prove ourselves as good soldiers, we must be willing to endure hardness; we must expect it and count

on it in this world. Paul, on several occasions, encouraged Timothy to be ready to suffer. “Be not therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). Later, in the same epistle, he charged Timothy to preach the word and endure afflictions which will surely come as a result of it.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. (2 Tim. 4:1-5)

We must be willing to bear it patiently and not be moved from our integrity. A soldier of Christ should be ready to follow His example of suffering. Peter revealed to the saints that they were called to suffer like Christ.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his

steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. (1 Pet. 2:21-23)

Jesus warned his disciples they were going to be partakers of His suffering:

Remember the word that is said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not Him that sent me. (John 15:20-21)

Christians must not come to Christ with their demands of conditions of peace being the only conditions under which they will serve. Far too many are AWOL because they are not at their assigned post of suffering for the cause of Christ. *A Christian Soldier Is AWOL When He Leaves His Post Of Service.*

Christians are servicemen and servicewomen. We serve the Lord Jesus Christ and all for which He stands. Paul revealed to the church of the Colossians that everything they do in service to one another must be done in view of serving Christ. That would provide proper motivation. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily; as to the Lord, and not unto me; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ"

(Col. 3:23-24). Those who serve the Lord must of necessity serve righteousness.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Rom. 6:16-18)

Those who serve the Lord must of necessity serve his people. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use no liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

The Hebrew writer reveals Christ to be the captain of our salvation. Therefore, the Christian’s aim is to serve his captain. “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). Christ is the commander and leader of His people, and we have willingly enlisted under His command to fight His battles under His banner. Paul described for the saints at Ephesus a spiritual warfare wherein the Christian soldier must be fitted with armor.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh

and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:11-17)

AWOL soldiers need to be reminded why they were being fitted for armor in the first place. It was not so they could look good in a uniform, but rather so they could fight against the enemies of Christ: Satan, sin, and the world. Satan is an enemy to Christ's person, sin is an enemy of Christ's righteousness, and the world is an enemy to Christ's way.

What Causes A Christian Soldier To Go AWOL?

Christian soldiers go AWOL for a variety of reasons.
A Failure To Count The Cost Of Discipleship Will Cause One To Go AWOL.

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not

his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:25-33)

A Failure To Untangle Oneself From The World He Left Will Cause One To Go AWOL.

Consider the Apostle Paul's words: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life" (2 Tim. 2:4). As Christian soldiers, we must be ready to attend the captain's orders. Therefore, we must cut loose from this world so that we are not diverted and drawn away from our duties and obligations to God and the great concerns of Christianity.

The Christian soldier must not allow himself to become divided in his interest. We must not be involved and implicated in worldly affairs and cares. Jesus revealed in His parable of the sower that those who exhibit a heart condition comparable to thorns will be choked out because they have divided interest.

And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. (Mark 4:18-19)

Jesus also taught the impossibility of pleasing two masters. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). We must be willing to give ourselves cheerfully to the work for which we have been called and be ready to depart at a moment’s notice from all worldly enjoyments. We must be ready to suffer the loss of all things for Christ and the gospel’s sake. Paul pressed this point on the church at Philippi when speaking of his former life.

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning

zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. (Phi. 3:4-8)

A Failure To Enthroned Christ In First Place In One's Life Will Cause One To Go AWOL.

Paul said that it is the responsibility of the soldier to please Him who had called him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:4). Once one enlists in the US military, he becomes the property of the United States Government. One must now please his superiors. Since Christ has enrolled us as His soldiers, He becomes the One Whom we must seek to please. We must not seek to please men, because they may cause us to compromise and contradict our Master. Christ demanded all who would follow Him to count our relationship to him greater than our earthly ties (Luke 14:26; Mat. 10:34-37).

We also have an example in Paul who did not seek to be pleasing unto men but God. Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

We must be careful not to please ourselves for danger of being tempted to seek our own ease and comfort. Jesus warned if one found his life, he would lose his life (Mat. 10:38-39). Jesus also taught a parable about a rich man who

was concerned only about his personal ease and comfort and was declared a fool by God for providing treasure for himself and not being rich toward God.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

What Can We Do To Reclaim The AWOL Soldiers?

We must convert them again. James discussed those who have erred from the truth and what must be done about it.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (Jam. 5:19-20)

James was describing one who has wandered away, one who is roaming. He has erred which means he is now in error because he has strayed away from the truth. Jesus said it is truth that makes one free (John 8:32). When one receives and obeys truth, one is set free from sin and its consequences. However, if one goes away from the truth that set him free, he places himself in the former condition from which he had been freed. James, therefore, classed him a sinner again who is in need of being converted so that the consequences of sin can be averted.

We Must Reclaim These AWOL Soldiers By Converting Them Again To Their Captain.

We must convert them again to Christ, the one who inhabits eternity (John 8:58; John 17:5; 1 John 1:1-3). We must present again the reason He was given to the world (John 3:16-17; Rom. 8:3; Rom. 5:6-8). We must present Him again as the One Who was owned by the Father (Mat. 3:17; Mat. 17:1-5). We must present Him again as confessed by men (Mat. 16:16-17; Acts 9:20). We must present Him again as raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 Pet. 1:3); and as the One Who ever liveth to intercede on our behalf (Heb. 7:25).

We Must Reclaim These AWOL Soldiers By Converting Them Again To Their Comrades.

When Christian soldiers go AWOL, they are not only leaving Christ, but they are also leaving their brethren. Peter described those in Christ as a brotherhood and encouraged us to love the brotherhood (1 Pet. 2:17). When a soldier goes AWOL, he is not thinking about his comrades; he is leaving unprotected. It is the same way in the body of Christ. We have a responsibility to our brethren. We must strengthen them. Peter was told by Christ to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:31-32). We must assist our brethren in carrying

heavy loads (Gal. 6:2). We must edify our brethren (Rom. 14:19; 1 The. 5:11). We must pray for our brethren (1 The. 5:25; Heb. 13:18; Jam. 5:16). What can an AWOL soldier do for a brother who is down? He cannot pick him up. What can he do for a brother when he is weak? He cannot strengthen him. What can he do for a brother when he is burdened with a heavy load? He cannot help him lighten the burden. It is true that many may be saved because we were at our posts fulfilling our responsibilities toward the brethren, and it is equally true that many may perish because we left our posts and became AWOL. The AWOL soldier needs to be reminded that he is not a soldier of one, but he is one soldier of many.

We Must Reclaim These AWOL Soldiers By Converting Them Again From Their Contender.

When Christian soldiers go AWOL, they are joining the ranks of one who is their enemy. Satan can never be considered an ally. He is man's enemy whether man accepts it or not. He has never meant man any good. From the very beginning of man's existence, He has shown his bad intentions. He deceived Eve with a lie and caused man to be thrown into chaos, confusion, death, and misery when she fell for the deception in disobedience to God.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her;

and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow

and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Gen. 3:4-24)

When God inquired of Satan whether or not he had considered a good man named Job, Satan's answer revealed that he had not only considered him, but revealed he could not get to him because of God's protective barrier.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:6-12)

It was Satan who entered into Judas in order to get him to betray our Lord.

Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. (Luke 22:1-6)

It was Satan who desired the opportunity to destroy the disciples of our Lord (Luke 22:31-32). Peter portrayed him as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus presented him as a murderer and a liar who has no truth in him (John 8:44). How could anyone trust a being who is the personification of evil? He is our enemy, contender, and adversary. When one goes AWOL, he has fallen right into the enemy's hand. What do you suppose this lying murderer will do to the traitors who have fallen into his hands once again? ***We Must Reclaim The AWOL Soldiers By Converting Them Again To Their Confidence.***

We are in a war, but we have been supplied armor to give us confidence in the fight against the wiles of the devil.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the

devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:10-17)

AWOL soldiers must pick up their armor and get back into the fight. Paul wrote that it is a fight of faith whereby we lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12).

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Great Battles

David And Goliath

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In many ways, the Bible has marked its place in modern English-speaking society. As quoted by the BBC, linguist David Crystal cited “257 phrases from the King James Bible in contemporary English idiom” (“King James”). But due most likely to the declining support for the Bible in general, the stories of God’s people are falling out of collective consciousness. A study carried out in Great Britain, for instance, found that 62% of the people surveyed knew nothing of the Prodigal Son, 60% could not identify the Good Samaritan, and only 5% could name all of the Ten Commandments (“Knowledge”).

It is, therefore, all the more surprising when a biblical event becomes—and remains—a part of “modern” culture. But that is exactly what the story of David and Goliath has done. While knowledge of the Ten Commandments, the Good Samaritan, and other Bible stories are fading from society’s memory, the account of David and Goliath is still in

heavy rotation. For instance, during their impressive back-to-back runs in the 2010-2011 NCAA tournaments, Butler's matchups—in particular the final games against Michigan State and UConn, respectively—were frequently billed as “David vs. Goliath” matchups. A New York Times article in April of 2011 was titled, “When David Meets Goliath on the Hardwood” (Rhoden), and no fewer than 10 other websites featured articles with the same or similar headlines.¹ Just this year, after MTSU's surprising win over Michigan State in the same tournament, the school's athletic director, Chris Massaro said, “We took down Goliath” (Wolken). In politics, Hillary Clinton is described as “Goliath” to Lincoln Chafee's “David” (Benko), while the push for democracy in Communist China is labeled “Hong Kong's David and Goliath Democracy Battle” (Gracie).

Obviously, then, popular culture is still enamored with the battle between David and Goliath. But why, when so much of the Bible's content is being discarded, does this story persevere? The answer lies, this author believes, in the nature of the battle and its two very different participants. The narrative of David and Goliath has become the story of

an underdog who, by all expectations, should not have won at all. This is the way we have told one another the story over the many centuries since. It is how the phrase “David and Goliath” has come to be embedded in our language—as a metaphor for improbable victory. (Gladwell 8-9)

When we examine the combatants in this timeless battle and the combat itself, and arrive at the conclusions the

modern reader should reach, it should become clear that the narrative in 1 Samuel 17 (KJV)—like all biblical narratives—deserves a place in our culture today.

The Combatants

The Young Shepherd

Much like Acts 7-9 foreshadow the changing focus of that book from Peter to Paul, so 1 Samuel 16-17 hint at a similar narrative shift from Saul to David. As one commentator notes, “Chapter 16 is a turning point of the story: the process of Saul’s actual removal from kingship begins” (Chisholm 110). It is in these two chapters, and particularly the account of the battle with the giant, that we begin to understand God’s description of David as “a man after his [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). Interestingly, however, we can also see the root of David’s future sin in some subtle yet important characterizations found in these chapters.

Admittedly, the chronology of the events depicted in 1 Samuel 16-17 is difficult to determine. While modern critics conjecture about original documents and later revisions, those of us who hold to biblical inspiration see only two options: (1) The anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16:1-13 took place **after** the fight with Goliath, as did his call to pacify Saul with his music, and therefore the events are arranged in order of theme rather than chronology (Firth 180). (2) The seeming discrepancy between 16:14-23 and 17:55 can be explained as Saul seeking **more** information about David’s family (Keil 478-479). For the purposes of this discussion, we will follow the first option, that is, that David’s fight with Goliath took place **before** he was anointed king.

With that in mind, consider the description of David by Saul’s servant in 1 Samuel 16:18: “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty

valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.” We are first met by a description of David as a **talented man**. Word of David’s musical abilities had reached the court of Saul, and certainly there was reason for such acclaim. It is likely that David, like most shepherds, carried in his “shepherd’s bag” (1 Sam. 17:40) a pipe, used primarily for the directing of his sheep (Patch). Notice the ESV rendering of Judges 5:16: “Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks?” The Hebrew word for *whistling* (*bleating* in the KJV) can also mean “piping,” and likely references the shepherd’s call with his pipe. As well, the Bedouin shepherds of modern Israel still carry a one- or two-stringed harp, called *rubaba* (Robinson), a version of which David would have played skillfully for Saul (1 Sam. 16:23). But David was familiar with more than just the shepherd’s usual instruments. Josephus describes David’s ability to **create** the following instruments:

He also made instruments of music, and taught the Levites to sing hymns to God, both on that called the sabbath [sic] day, and on other festivals. Now the construction of the instruments was thus: The viol was an instrument of ten strings, it was played upon with a bow; the psaltery had twelve musical notes, and was played upon by the fingers; the cymbals were broad and large instruments, and were made of brass. (Josephus 7.12.3)

This agrees with Amos’ words in Amos 6:5 (howbeit this is cited as a **negative** in Amos): “That chant to the sound

of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick [sic], like David.”

Along with the description of David as a virtuoso musician, Saul’s servant describes him as “a mighty valiant man, and a man of war.” It is at this statement that our understanding of the chronology of 1 Samuel 16-17 is important. If this portion of 1 Samuel is laid out chronologically, then the reference here to David’s military prowess would have to allude solely to his experiences as a shepherd, since David would have not yet fought the giant or served in Saul’s army. However, if, as we supposed above, this chapter and the next are arranged **thematically**, then the description of David as a mighty warrior makes more sense.

Regardless of the chronology, David burst onto the scene as a man acquainted more with guerilla warfare than the traditional methods of war. In his shepherd’s bag mentioned above, David would have carried alongside his pipe a sling (1 Sam. 17:49-50), likely made out of leather or animal hair (Nicol). His prowess with such a weapon would be on display during his battle with Goliath, and the abilities of the weapon will be further discussed in the section labeled “The Combat.” Along with his familiarity with the sling, David himself cited his ability to fight at close quarters, as he defeated both a lion and a bear while defending his father’s flock, going so far as to catch the lion “by the beard” (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Thus, David likely learned a fighting style that was unorthodox but effective, further evidenced by his unwillingness to use Saul’s armor (1 Sam. 17:39). His fighting prowess only becomes more impressive when coupled with David’s intense bravery. I can imagine David telling Saul with a steady and confident voice, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:32). It is no wonder that he would soon be so successful a warrior that

women would sing of him, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7).

The servant of Saul goes on to describe David as “prudent in matters” and “a comely person.” Both of these descriptions point to David as outwardly appealing, both in speech (some translate *prudent in matters* as *eloquent*; see Keil 478) and in physical appearance. A similar description is given of him by the narrator in 1 Samuel 16:12: “Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.” While God discouraged Samuel from looking on the “outward appearance,” and despite David’s relative appearance to his brethren (1 Sam. 16:6-13), the young shepherd was nonetheless handsome and capable of effective communication.

By far, the most important description given of David by Saul’s servant is the last: “The Lord is with him.” This statement underscores at least two key points relative to the battle between David and Goliath. First, this statement reveals something about David—that he was **a man of great spiritual character**. For instance, his indignation toward the Philistine giant is kindled because he dared to “defy the armies of the living God” (1 Sam. 17:26; 1 Sam. 17:36), and his speech to Goliath re-emphasizes the same:

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the

wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. (1 Sam. 17:45-47)

Note in this speech the undercurrent of **faith!** It is not man that Goliath is challenging, but God “whom thou hast defied.” It is not man who will win the battle, but God who will “give you into our hands.” Certainly David—though perhaps no older than fifteen (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 175)—here earns his place in the annals of faith (Heb. 11:32-34).

Second, “the Lord is with him” indicates something about God—that **God had chosen David**. This statement stands in stark contrast to the description of Saul earlier in chapter 16: “But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him” (1 Sam. 16:14). David was “a man after [God’s] own heart” and Saul was not (1 Sam. 13:14), and God had therefore moved on from Saul, both personally and as king of Israel.

So David, though young and relatively inexperienced in tactical warfare, had the natural talents, the bravery, and the faith in God necessary to win a battle with a giant and eventually become a national hero. But in this same context, there are subtle hints of the flaws that would torment David throughout his life. For instance, consider the focus on his physical appearance in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 1 Samuel 16:18 mentioned above. As one author stated:

While the Lord looks on the heart,
people . . . have a tendency to look on
the outward appearance. Though David

is not as obviously a candidate for king as his older brother Eliab, he nevertheless is physically appealing. Though he apparently has a “heart” that impresses God, he will be, because of his special physical qualities, susceptible to the temptations that inevitably face those who are so endowed. (Chisholm 115)

This is especially interesting when considering David’s sin with Bathsheba. The narrator describes Bathsheba as “very beautiful to look upon” (2 Sam. 11:2), a statement which bears a striking similarity, both in Hebrew and English, to “goodly to look to” in 1 Samuel 16:12 (Chisholm). Perhaps the similarities underscore the link between their good looks and the snare of temptation into which they fell.

An interesting tone surrounds David’s preliminary discussion with the men of Israel (1 Sam. 17:23-29). While he is certainly concerned about God’s reputation and the well-being of Israel—as is evident in our earlier treatment of 1 Samuel 17:26—there is an air of selfishness in these words: “What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel?” (1 Sam. 16:26). Is this statement a hint at the selfishness that would afflict David throughout his kingship? His desire for fanfare cost him—or others—on a number of occasions, not the least of which left Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:7; cf. 2 Samuel 6:5) and 70,000 men dead (2 Sam. 24:15; cf. 2 Sam. 24:1-4). And it took Nathan’s parable for David to see how selfishness had driven his decisions with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah (2 Sam. 11-12).

The Uncircumcised Philistine

Goliath stands in stark contrast to the character of David mentioned above. Obviously, most who know anything

about the account focus first on the height of the giant. He was, according to the text, “six cubits and a span” (1 Sam. 17:4). This would add up to an impressive 9’ 9” tall, based upon 18” per cubit and half that per span. While some have attempted to discredit this height as impossible and have cited some manuscripts that adopted the “four cubits and a span” reading (Firth 192), such a height is certainly not impossible. Consider the tallest man on modern record, Robert Wadlow, who was 8’11” **and still growing** at his death (Gladwell 14).

Adding to the giant’s impressive appearance was the armor that he wore. He wore a brass helmet on his head, a piece of armor that may have been unusual for a Philistine warrior and may have indicated a “special role” for him in their military. A “coat of mail” that likely extended down to his knees weighed “five thousand shekels of brass” (1 Sam. 17:5), which would equal well over 100 lbs. (Firth 196). He wore “greaves of brass” on his legs, which would have protected the shins and had a “target” hanging between his shoulders (some translations render this “javelin,” as Firth 190). Rounding out Goliath’s weaponry was a “spear” whose head weighed “six hundred shekels of iron,” or over 10 lbs. (Keil 481), and a large shield that was carried by a shield-bearer (1 Sam. 17:7).

It is easy to see why the Philistines chose this man to be their “champion,” literally “a man between two” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 177). Goliath filled the role of one who engaged in single combat against another great warrior from the enemy, with such a contest often deciding the entire battle (1 Sam. 17:9). The giant was perfectly outfitted for such an event. The Philistines had been spurs in the side of Israel since the Exodus (Exo. 13:17) and throughout the time of the Judges, and they felt they had every reason to be confident on this occasion.

Of course, Goliath, his Philistine brethren, and even the majority of the Israelites, were looking only at external characteristics, in stark contrast to David's reliance on God. Goliath called for "a man for you, and let **him** come down to **me**. If **he** be able . . . to kill **me**" (1 Sam. 17:8-9), while David said, "The **Lord** . . . **He** will deliver **me** out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). He called the opposing armies "the armies of **Israel**" (1 Sam. 17:10), while David called them "the armies of the **living God**" (1 Sam. 17:26; all emphasis CP). And when Israel heard the words of Goliath, they were "dismayed, and greatly afraid" (1 Sam. 17:11), just as years before when surveying the land of Promise (Num. 13:33), while David assured Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him" (1 Sam. 17:32).

The Combat

Different Focus

A close study of the actual battle between David and Goliath is certainly a study in contrasts. What should immediately catch our eye is the difference of perspective between each of the combatants. Notice Goliath's first reaction to seeing David:

And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. (1 Sam. 17:42-44)

In the giant we see two common characteristics of the powerful: underestimation of the opponent and a resulting overconfidence. Because David was young, good-looking, and lightly-armed, Goliath was certain he would win the battle. The Philistine had superior armor, superior size, superior experience (or so he thought), and superior weaponry (again, or so he thought).

David, unlike Goliath, understood the value of **mobility**. As noted previously, he refused Saul's armor because he had not "proved them" (1 Sam. 17:39). It is also interesting that David said, "I cannot go with these." David was unused to armor in general, being a shepherd, and Saul's armor specifically; therefore, using them would have greatly restricted his movement and nullified any advantage David had in his mobility.

Different Firepower

Certainly, the giant gained a great deal of confidence from his weaponry as well as his size. His sword, armor, and javelin, all meant for relatively close combat, were lethal in that arena. He was likely an expert in close-quarters battle, and the bystanders likely assumed from David's story about the bear and lion that David was going to fight Goliath in his preferred manner—up close.

Immediately after he refused Saul's armor, however, David chose his "five smooth stones" and prepared his sling (1 Sam. 17:40). David understood the power of this weapon against a soldier like Goliath. The slingshot was a deadly weapon in the hands of the right soldier. There was a special class of soldier known as the "slingers" (2 Kin. 3:25) who were likely equivalent to the artillery divisions of modern militaries. The children of Benjamin were considered elite artillery soldiers because "every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss" (Jud. 20:16). And the stones

they slung could inflict great damage. Note the following description from Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*:

Eitan Hirsch, a ballistics expert with the Israeli Defense Forces, recently did a series of calculations showing that a typical-size stone hurled by an expert slinger at a distance of thirty-five meters would have hit Goliath's head with a velocity of thirty-four meters per second— more than enough to penetrate his skull and render him unconscious or dead. In terms of stopping power, that is equivalent to a fair-size modern handgun. “We find,” Hirsch writes, “that David could have slung and hit Goliath in little more than one second— a time so brief that Goliath would not have been able to protect himself and during which he would be stationary for all practical purposes. (11)

It could be said, then, that David was more heavily armed than Goliath. Indeed, in the same work it is noted: “Goliath had as much chance against David . . . as any Bronze Age warrior with a sword would have had against an [opponent] armed with a .45 automatic pistol.” (12)

David knew that his advantages lay in his **mobility** and ability to **strike quickly from distance**. Note that he “hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine” (1 Sam. 17:48), utilizing his speed and mobility against the slower and less agile giant. By refusing to play by Goliath's rules of

close combat and swordplay, David was able to turn seeming disadvantages—smaller size, less armor, unconventional weaponry—into distinct advantages. The narrator makes special note of the discrepancy: “So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David” (1 Sam. 17:50).

Different Faith

Goliath’s—and the Philistine’s—faith lay in two impotent sources: his false gods and his physical prowess. After David cut off the champion’s head, the text reveals that “when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled” (1 Sam. 17:51). With the object of their faith destroyed, the Philistines had no choice but to run.

The opposite is true of the Israelites. Upon witnessing the death of Goliath, these people—who had before been immobile and afraid—“arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines” (1 Sam. 17:52). Certainly, David’s faith was contagious, and it was on full display during this battle. Recall the words of David just before he engaged Goliath:

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there

is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. (1 Sam. 17:45-47)

While it is certainly possible that David accomplished this feat without miraculous assistance, we cannot minimize the role of faith in the events that unfolded. He certainly understood that, no matter his abilities, he required God's blessing to accomplish victory. David's courage, ability, and intelligence, coupled with and dependent upon his faith in God and God's providential care, secured the victory over the giant.

The Conclusions

What Kind Of Soldier Am I?

David is remembered in religious and secular history for many reasons, not the least of which is the battle that has been under consideration here. Both Peter and Paul, in their first recorded sermons after Jesus' ascension, used David as the bedrock for their inspired messages (Acts 2:25ff; Acts 13:22-23), with Paul even hearkening back to that statement that David was "a man after his [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). But as we reflect back on the wonderful works of David, we cannot gloss over those character traits that came to light just prior to his battle with Goliath—those same traits that dug a chasm of guilt and sorrow through the remainder of his life.

We would do well to consider ourselves in light of such an example. If one who is "after God's own heart" can have such dark tendencies, what about me? As one commentator observed, "When human beings are involved, the potential for failure is always latent, even in one as impressive (even

to God!) as David” (Chisholm 115). We are commanded to “examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith; prove [our] own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13:5). The verb *examine* means “to test objectively, to scrutinize”; to *prove* means “to recognize as genuine after examination”; and “know” gives the idea of full knowledge after examination (Vincent 360). If only David had known his own weaknesses at the battle with Goliath! If only he had known some of the same characteristics that equipped him for that battle might cost him other, more costly ones!

And the same rings true for the Christian. We are to equip ourselves as “good soldiers” (2 Tim. 2:1-7), and this means, among other things, knowing which “besetting sin” to guard against (Heb. 12:1-2), which “snare” to avoid (1 Tim. 3:7; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Tim. 2:26). The Christian armor can protect us (Eph. 6), but only if we know which areas are the most vulnerable.

What Kind Of Battles Am I Facing?

We began this discussion by considering the timelessness of the biblical account of David and Goliath. It endures because the underdog tale rings true for all of us—and for good reason. In a very real sense, each of us is the underdog in some very important battles.

Consider **the battle waging over sin**. This battle, though often characterized as a societal battle, is in reality a battle between two **challengers**: sin and the human soul. Paul describes the battle:

For though we walk in the flesh, we
do not war after the flesh: (For the
weapons of our warfare are not carnal,
but mighty through God to the pulling

down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

The confrontation is one that takes place on the battlefield of the mind, utilizing spiritual weaponry and with spiritual destinies hanging in the balance.

But too often, like Goliath, we rest confident in our armor, too certain of our abilities to fight off sin, never realizing that we stand vulnerable and desperate. For we fail to see that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), that outside of Christ we are left with “no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Without the blood of Christ, we stand as the ultimate underdogs, only with no chance to win, and sudden and eternal defeat our only future.

Or what about **the battle of life**? Since the fall of man from the Garden of Eden, sorrow, labor, thorns, and thistles have characterized human existence (Gen. 3:17). The “vanity” that the Preacher sees in Ecclesiastes stems from lives lived as the underdog to cancer, to loss, to suffering, and ultimately, to death. We are powerless to control man’s “last enemy.”

But herein lies the joyful lesson of the underdog: we can win battles that seem unwinnable, **if we fight differently**. We do not defeat sin on our own terms, with our own merit (Eph. 2:9-10). Rather, we find victory over sin through obedience to Christ (Rom. 8:1-2)! The blood of Christ “shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28) cleanses us at baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 7:14) and continues to cleanse us as we “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7).

When we see a world characterized by sorrow and death, we do not resign ourselves to “eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32). Rather, we put our trust in a God Who is able to “do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20)! We recognize that cancer can beat us physically but can never take our souls! As Paul reminds us:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.
(2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Ultimately, we take those disadvantages—the sorrow, pain, and trials—and allow them to strengthen us so that “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7).

The message of the Gospel, translated through the battle between David and Goliath, is simple: “the battle”—no matter what the battle might be—“is the Lord’s” (1 Sam. 17:47). Framed in the window of eternity, the Christian can boldly say,

Nay, in all these things we are **more than conquerors through him that loved us.**

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:37-39; emphasis CP)

Notes

¹ Search *Butler basketball David and Goliath* on the Internet.

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Special Forces

Elders: Leaders In The Lord's Army

Paul Sain



Paul Sain has been married to Ladon for the last 51 years. Together, they have four daughters and seven granddaughters. He has been preaching full time since 1961 and has been heavily involved in radio and television work for over 40 years. Paul has done local work in Missouri, Tennessee, and Alabama. For the past 40 years, he has owned Sain Publications where they publish over 70 books and tracks on a yearly basis, as well as the *Studying Through the Bible* classroom material. Paul has authored over a dozen books. In addition to publishing and writing, he and Ladon also own Sain Video Productions where they direct and produce multiple programs each month that air on Fox, Inspiration, and Gospel Broadcasting Network Programs.

With bold confidence, and little fear of contradiction, may I say, **The greatest need in the Lord's church today is spiritual, godly, visionary, courageous, knowledgeable, scriptural, spiritual leaders!** I sincerely believe this to be an accurate assessment. The church in so many locations has a leadership crisis! Few seek to serve as elders; young boys do not look up to their elders as their heroes. Some serve as elders who should not; some do not serve as elders who should.

The Lord's church can be no better than her leaders (elders). The spiritual tone and attitude of the eldership will be reflected in the flock.

We have not been commanded to lead people out of bondage (as Moses). We are not challenged to rebuild a wall (Nehemiah). But the precious bride of Christ desperately

needs men to follow the great example of great leaders of the past (Moses, Nehemiah, and others) and spiritually lead the flock to glory. How many congregations have suffered greatly because of a lack of spiritual leaders or ones who failed to feed the flock. How many souls will ultimately be lost because men were appointed as shepherds who were not spiritually qualified to so lead. How tragic that as a brotherhood we have allowed this condition to exist, persist, and span generations of time.

The Lord's church is the place of salvation (KJV, 2 Tim. 2:10). The Lord adds the obedient, submissive one to His church (Acts 2:47). Understanding that we are mere strangers and pilgrims here on earth (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:13), we press toward the mark of the prize (Phi. 3:13-14). Spiritual leaders are of utmost importance to reach that goal.

Introduction

The church of our Lord exists in a hostile world. From the beginning of the church our Lord purchased, to this day in time, Christians have been at war. Satan is the enemy (1 Pet. 5:8) and seeks to destroy all followers of Christ, those who are "of this way" (Acts 9:2). He will use any means, tactics, wiles, lies, etc., possible to accomplish his evil desires.

The Holy Scriptures portray various picturesque images of the church—it is the **body** of Christ of which we are members. The church is the **kingdom** of which we are citizens. The church is the **vineyard** of which we are workers. The picture this lesson involves is the church as the **army** of which we are soldiers. What a marvelous, perfect comparison/illustration concerning the beautiful bride of Christ.

Christians are to obey their Commander In Chief, Jesus Christ. We have a mission—the salvation of souls. We fight alongside our fellow soldiers against the enemy (Satan) who is

our vicious adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). We are well equipped with the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18). We must never go AWOL or be MIA. It is our passion to be “home” (“heaven”) since this land in which we are fighting is not home.

Listen to the Word of God address how we are to fight in the army of the Lord:

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare. (1 Tim. 1:18)

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. (1 Tim. 6:12)

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. (2 Cor. 10:4)

Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (Heb. 11:34)

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

The emphasis of the inspired writers is concise and clear. We must fight the good fight of faith, war a good warfare, and wax valiant in the fight to be able to conclude our life with an attitude of confidence by having fought a good fight for our Master and Lord.

As we examine the inspired Scriptures regarding elders and overseers of the Lord's church, we are intrigued to examine the words from which the words *elder*, *bishop*, *pastor*, *overseer*, etc., are translated. Whether we use the King James, American Standard of 1901, New King James, New American Standard, etc., we discover six words that are used to refer to the office of an elder of the Lord's church. These six words are translated from only three Greek words: (1) *presbuteros*—translated elder or presbyter, which refers to the governing of the Lord's church by elders (Acts 20:17); (2) *episkopos*—translated bishop or overseer, which refers to being in charge of (Acts 20:28); and (3) *poimen*—translated shepherd or pastor, which infers leadership qualities (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-5).

Elders: Leader In The Lord's Army

The greatest work in the world is serving, honoring, and glorifying Christ. Whatever role we are blessed to serve, we must do with passion and zeal. From what may seem as

the least important task to what some believe to be the most important task, every action, role, and work is crucial to win effectively and successfully the eternity-determining battle in which God's people are engaged.

It is the humble opinion of this writer that the greatest need and role today (as well as since the church began almost 2,000 years ago) is faithful, godly, spiritual leaders in every congregation of the Lord's people. Yet may I hasten to say, it is not an easy task (role) to fulfill scripturally and spiritually.

How can we even imagine winning the battle against the forces of our adversary, the devil (1 Pet. 5:8), without adequately qualified and God-fearing leaders? How can the Lord's army (each soldier serving under the leadership of the leaders) function, daily serve, and stand strong in each battle without leaders as God desires? How can we imagine a body of Christ being unified, organized, and shining spiritual lights in a world of darkness without leaders whose faith we are to follow (Heb. 13:7)? How can we imagine warring a good warfare, fighting a good fight of faith, and waxing valiant in battle when we do not have good and godly leaders in this battle? Is it not the reality that exists today that the reason many (young and old) have turned from following Christ is a lack of spiritual leaders guiding, challenging, motivating, feeding, warning, protecting, and assisting the flock? According to the instruction given by God's Word, a plurality of men must serve (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; Phi. 1:1). It would be contrary to God's will to have one man to serve a congregation as an elder.

Because of the importance of the Lord's church, because maintaining and being successful as children of God at every location is crucial, because not just any and every man can nor should be appointed as an elder, God has provided specific qualifications (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1; 1 Pet. 5) for those who

are being considered to serve in this role. The apostle Paul lists twenty-two different qualifications. He itemizes ten in his letters to both Timothy and Titus. Five are mentioned in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that are not mentioned in the other book.

A brief examination of these qualifications reflect the serious and sober work in which they are involved. J. W. McGarvey offers five categories of the various qualifications: (1) experience, (2) reputation, (3) domestic, (4) character, and (5) habits.

Let us examine the exact words or phrases found in Scripture.

1. Desire. If one does not have a desire (aspire, seek, stretch out the hands after) to serve in this capacity, he is unqualified to serve. Without doubt, some may desire the position for sinful ambition, reasons not pleasing to our Father. First Timothy 3:1 includes the phrase about desiring the office of a bishop, "he desireth a good work." One must not be forced to accept this work, pressured into serving, when his heart and mind does not desire or have a servant mentality.

2. Blameless (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6-7). While this does not mean that one has never been accused of any wrong-doing, it does mean he is blameless, which means any such charges could not be proven or sustained. Gareth Reese wrote, "A man against whom no charge of immorality, or of holding false doctrine, or of habitually practicing any sin, can be sustained" (112). In similar words, he must be a morally upright, honest individual whose reputation is unimpeachable.

3. Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). This phrase confirms an elder must be a male, a married man. One who is not married is not qualified to serve as an elder. He must not have more than one wife. This qualification prohibits

polygamy. We should not conclude that if a man's wife dies, and he remarries, that he is not qualified. He would then be the husband of one wife. Little explanation of this qualification needs to be made—it is self-explanatory.

4. Vigilant (1 Tim. 3:2). Some words can logically be grouped together, the definition overlapping in thought. Vigilance suggests being sound in mind, able to keep alert and watchful. If one is unconcerned about truth and righteousness, without a love of souls, indifferent and apathetic, he fails miserably to qualify as an elder or even be acceptable to God as a servant.

5. Sober (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). This means sober in judgment. It is one who is careful in the use of meat and drink, curbing appetites and emotions that otherwise would prevent his overseeing of the flock. He is level-headed, sensible, and thoughtful. One to serve as an elder must not be foolish, giddy, and unreliable.

6. Of good behavior (1 Tim. 3:2). This carries the idea of respectable, well-arranged, and orderly. It is the opposite of unorganized, rough, and uncouth. His manner of life reflects that he is a spiritual man of God. He has a reputation of integrity and common sense. Robert Taylor states,

Leadership in God's church must possess men who are orderly and whose lives are arranged well both in the motive and mission, both in attitude and action, both in language and daily living. (78)

7. Given to hospitality/lover of hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). This is one who sets the example before the congregation of extending hospitality to visitors, members, or strangers. He loves others and shows his love in action.

He is willing to entertain others (even strangers), willing to relieve the needs of others with clothing and food or shelter. If one does not possess a heart of concern and generosity, he fails to meet this qualification of a lover of hospitality.

8. Apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). He is able to teach the Word of God in whatever occasion or setting. He possesses a knowledge that enables him to communicate the good news to others. He is one who is willing to teach a Bible class, which leads others to serve in a similar work. Formal education is not the necessary ingredient to being an effective Bible teacher, but being in love with the Master, sitting consistently at the Master's feet is the all-important element. Elders must be a leading example of this urgent work, inspiring others to be involved likewise.

9. Not given to wine (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:7). An elder is not to be a drunkard, but further he is not to be argumentative and unreasonable. Temperate (previously mentioned) suggests an abstinence from wine. It is helpful to recall the time in which these inspired words were written and to whom. Some scholars have stated it means that one should not be ready to quarrel and offer wrong, as one in wine.

10. No striker (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). This man is not quick-tempered, ready to explode and attack others and easy to get into a fight or use physical force to achieve what he desires. In other words, he is not a contentious and quarrelsome person. An individual with such a mind-set would quickly bring great harm to the precious bride of Christ.

11. Not greedy of filthy lucre (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). To serve as an elder over the church of our Lord, one cannot be a lover of money. If his priorities centered on material matters, could he not be tempted to favor wealthy members and their preferences? Would it not be likely he would not focus on

decisions for spiritual reasons? Would he not hesitate to lead the flock courageously and with vision in faith to help mission efforts and to spend money to do the will of the Father? He must be an honest person of integrity, one not covetous of material gain.

12. Patient (1 Tim. 3:3; gentle in the ASV). This describes one who is kind, fair, and willing to yield his own rights to assist and encourage a brother. Reasonable, helpful, polite, longsuffering and generous are the qualities that enable him to control himself and reflect a meek spirit. The shepherd of God's flock which would include weak babes in Christ (1 Pet. 2:2) must follow the example of our Savior.

13. Not a brawler/not soon angry (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). One to serve as an elder must not be contentious and does not always insist on having his way. He does not possess an arrogant, ill-tempered, quarrelsome disposition. He watches his tongue and temperament. He seeks to have the mind and spirit of his Savior, Jesus Christ. He brings honor and spirituality to the eldership, not obsession and dominance, insisting on his way or else.

14. Not covetous (1 Tim. 3:2). He is not a lover of money. Earthly material matters are not his primary goal in life. He refuses to be assertive in the way much of the world seeks, laying up treasures on earth (Mat. 6:19ff), but focuses on laying up treasures in heaven, seeking the mind of Christ (Phi. 2:5). Our respected brother Robert Taylor suggests, "A covetous man loves gold above God, silver above the Savior, and prizes money above the Messiah."

15. One that ruleth well his own house/having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly (1 Tim. 3:4; Tit. 1:6). How can a man oversee the house of God if he cannot oversee his own home, including his children? An elder is to rule or manage, superintend or preside over the children of

God as a shepherd. He is responsible to lead, protect, feed, and rule the flock.

16. Having his children in subjection with all gravity (1 Tim. 3:2). Thus far, we know it is a man, married man and now with believing children who is qualified to serve as an elder in the local congregation. The purpose of this qualification is obvious. A faithful father, head of his home, can and does direct his home spiritually and leads these children to follow the Lord. Questions often arise regarding if a man has multiple children, does it mean every one must be a Christian? Or after a child leaves home, establishing his own home/life, what if he falls away from the Lord? Does that disqualify a man from serving as an elder? Interesting questions and studies produce the following conclusion: If in doubt, there is a safe way to eliminate concerns. Further, if followers question a situation or concern, they will not follow his leadership.

17. Not a novice (1 Tim. 3:6). An elder is not to be a new convert, not a beginner. This is not speaking of age but rather the spiritual stage of one's life. Growing in knowledge and experience is essential to oversee and lead the church of our Lord. A babe (1 Pet. 2:2) cannot fulfill these requirements.

18. Good report of them which are without (1 Tim. 3:7). The world outside views the church often by her leaders. If an elder is a reckless, worldly person, he would be a hindrance to the cause of Christ. To be qualified, he must be viewed of those in the world favorably and honorably.

19. Not self-willed (Tit. 1:7). He does not have a stubborn, quick-tempered, must-have-my-way temperament but a spirit of cooperation, love for others, even preferring others more than self.

20. Lover of good men (Tit. 1:8). This is one who loves what is good and holy. He has a heart that seeks good and

noble ways in others. Compare Philippians 4:6ff and the elder of God loves these things and attributes.

21. Just (Tit. 1:8). He cares for others and is fair and honorable toward all. His word is true and he practices what he preaches. He fervently seeks to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world (Tit. 2:11-12).

22. Holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Tit. 1:8). As God is holy, this man seeks to reflect a life of godliness and holiness. His daily life is a shining light of righteousness and holiness (Col. 1:22; 2 Pet. 3:11; Tit. 2:11-12).

23. Temperate (Tit. 1:8). He controls his desires and appetites. He is self-disciplined in words, deeds, habits, time, and manners. He refuses to allow the world to conform him to their mold (Rom. 12:1-2).

24. Holding fast the faithful word (Tit. 1:9). His loyalty and allegiance is to His Savior and His Word/teaching. He holds tightly—clings—to the doctrine of Christ, realizing none other has the power to save.

The Qualifications Of Elders As Compiled By H. Leo Boles.

1. Devoutness or Reverence for God—“Blameless,” “Of good behavior,” “an example of believers in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

2. Intelligence and ability—“Apt to teach.”

3. Knowledge of the truth—“Able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers.”

4. Steadfastness in the faith—“Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught.”

5. Executive Ability—“One that ruleth well his own house; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” “Having faithful children,” “having children that believe.”

6. Good Reputation—"Of good report of them that are without."

7. Mature Years—Implied in the statements, "One that ruleth well his own house; having his children in subjection with all gravity," "having children that believe."

8. Not a recent convert—"Not a novice."

9. Capacity for Prayer—"The elders of the church, let them pray over him" (Jam. 5:14).

10. Sobriety—"Sober," "Not given to wine," "no brawler."

11. Generosity—"Not covetous," "given to hospitality," "Not given to filthy lucre."

12. Temperance and prudence—"Not self-willed," "Temperate," "blameless."

13. Gravity and love of justice—"With all gravity," "just."

14. Patience and gentleness—"No striker," "not soon angry," "gentle unto all men."

15. Carefulness as to his associates—"A lover of good men."

16. Energy and watchfulness—"Vigilant."

17. Care in selecting a wife—"The husband of one wife," (no polygamist, not a divorced man).

To summarize the qualifications: One must not serve by constraint (1 Pet. 5:2-13), nor for money's sake and not lording it over God's heritage. An elder must take heed to himself (Acts 20:28); take heed to all the flock; feed the flock; be an example; and warn and protect the church.

Qualifications matter! Just because a man is a good moral man, a successful business man, or an older man with experience in many fields does NOT automatically mean he is qualified to serve as an elder of the Lord's church. Likely we have known men who were appointed because of these reasons, yet they possibly were covetous, inhospitable, imprudent, spiritually immature, lacking in biblical

knowledge, power-hungry, crowd-pleasers. Tragically, bad elders is a worse situation than no elders.

In this study, we intend to explore what the Scriptures teach that God expects of elders, what He does not expect of men serving as elders, the various roles in which a faithful elder must serve, cautions and warnings regarding the eldership, and what responsibility the local congregation should have toward their eldership. Let us first ask the question:

What Does God Not Expect Of Elders?

A brief perusal of the references in Scripture to elders leading congregations in the first century, the qualifications as provided in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, along with pertinent facts found in Hebrews and 1 Peter lets us draw the following conclusions. God does **not** expect men who will serve as elders to:

Be Perfect (Sinless).

None are without sin (Rom. 3:23). Everyone will make mistakes or fail to follow Christ, our example (1 Pet. 2:21ff), to perfection. If one is required to be sinless, then none would ever meet such qualifications. Yet, while one cannot be perfect, one who serves as an elder must strive to attain all qualifications and do so with excellence as possible.

In view of our study focusing on the Lord's army—surely none would suggest that any General, Sergeant, Lieutenant, etc., has made every decision to perfection. Wars have been lost, men have needlessly died, and countries have collapsed due to the wrong decision.

Know Everything/Master The Bible.

The wonderful, infallible, complete truth of God cannot be mastered. A human cannot know everything about the Word of God and be able to answer any and every question

that ever arises. Yes, it is important for an elder to understand the Scriptures, be spiritually mature, able to recognize truth as well as error, be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), but let us make sure we do not add qualifications in addition to what is specified in Scripture.

The greatest leader in any army of the world can pursue facts, statistics, and strategic knowledge—but at the end of the day, he must do his best, at that moment in time, and recognize his weaknesses.

Neglect Your Family In Your Service As An Elder.

Shepherding the flock is of great value but it must **not** deprive you of being the husband and father needed by your family. They are likewise of great import. All faithful men must supply the needs of their family (1 Tim. 3:4-7; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 6:1-4; Eph. 5:23-33).

Even if a man excelled as a leader of an army, if he failed as a husband, he is not a success. If this powerful leader was a miserable, neglectful father, he has failed at the most important role in his life.

Be A Perfect Peace-Maker And Resolve Every Conflict.

It is impossible to resolve every matter that may arise. In Romans 12:18 we are encouraged to live peaceably with all men “if it be possible.” Not all division is condemned in God’s Word. We must not participate in nor condone evil (2 John 9-11).

Even the greatest leader and most powerful conqueror will be unable to resolve every conflict that he may face. He can do his best. He can plead for unity and peace, but none can be perfect in this role.

What Does God Expect Of Elders?

Elders do not make laws, create new doctrine, nor lord over the flock. God’s faithful elders take the oversight with

fear and trembling, recognizing they will give an account of their actions in judgment (Heb. 13:17). As a shepherd cares for a flock of sheep, so must the shepherd of God's flock care for all people, saved or lost.

Knowledge Of The Truth

In order to fulfill the duties and responsibilities as a spiritual leader, one must possess a significant knowledge of God's Word. He must be firmly grounded in the truth. One without adequate knowledge would not be able to ascertain truth from error; he would be unable to stand for and defend the truth. Without a seasoned knowledge of truth, he would be ill-equipped to oppose and expose the error that could result in souls being lost eternally. An elder must be able and willing to teach others the truth. The opportunities for this may be in Bible classes, personally one-on-one, in home Bible studies, or whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Attributes Of A Leader

This includes sincere, genuine, honest, proven loyalty to the Saviour, a servant mentality, and love for all souls (to itemize a few). His leadership must be based on inspiration, not domination; on cooperation, not intimidation. Aristotle is reported to have taught, "He who has never learned to serve cannot be a good leader." John Maxwell said, "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

Passion

The Bible often offers parallel thought of zeal, fervency, loyalty, and allegiance—God's elder must be passionate about truth, the church, the saved as well as the lost. There is not an alternative, a middle ground for right vs. wrong, truth vs. error, Christ vs. Satan, the one way of salvation vs. man's many religious ways, etc. We likely will be called legalistic, narrow-minded, etc., when we insist on "the way" of Christ—but it is the only way to heaven, as taught

in Scriptures. God's servant cannot waver, be tossed to and fro, attempt to please all (even at the expense of truth) and always be politically correct. As Vince Lombardi said, "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will." We must passionately seek to do the will of the Father (Mat. 7:21).

Strength/Courage

As previously stated, serving as an elder of the Lord's church is a serious, sober, and grave task. A weak, spineless individual should not ever accept this role. Especially at times, great courage is required to fulfill faithfully the work placed upon you by the Chief Shepherd. To make difficult decisions, to endeavor to bring peace when conflicts exist, to stand opposed to doctrines contrary to the doctrine of Christ, etc., requires spiritual strength that only godly and spiritual men can understand and possess.

Vision/Contagious Excitement

The very essence and totality of leadership is vision. It is not a lack of abilities that restricts us, but our vision. Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision" (Helen Keller). "Where there is no vision, there is no hope" (George Washington Carver). "A great leader's courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion, not position" (John Maxwell).

To illustrate, if you are presently serving as an elder, what is the plan of the eldership for the next few years. Do you have a 5-, 10-, 20-year plan? This should be not just in matters of attendance but more importantly, in the spiritual development of the individual members. What methods are implemented to insure the growth (numerical and spiritual) of the flock with which you are charged by the Master?

Communication

An open dialog between the leaders and members is crucial to the flock following your leadership. James Humes said, “The art of communication is the language of leadership.” To seek involvement, communicate. To prevent misunderstanding, communicate. To reduce or eliminate gossip and rumors, communicate. To be a successful and efficient leader, communicate.

Accountability

An eldership must accept the fact that they are not accountable to themselves only. Functional elders will be willing to help the flock to know of their goals, intentions, and longings. Surely, they know as His servants they will give an account of their work as elders (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:4).

Produce More Leaders

Ralph Nader said, “Function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.” What a challenging thought. While followers are desired, the role of leaders in serving their Lord is to secure that congregation’s future by preparing, developing, training, and encouraging members to be leaders. It will be challenging and difficult. But “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty” (Winston Churchill).

Various Roles In Which A Faithful Elder Will Serve

An elder (eldership) will wear various “hats” in day-to-day service to the Master. Some will be pleasant. Others will likely be unpleasant. Years ago, I heard one say, “An elder needs glasses to look wise, gray hair to look experienced, and an in-grown toenail to look concerned.” A clear understanding is needed to know they are servants, not masters. They are shepherds, not a board of directors. They are elders, not deacons (delegate mundane affairs to deacons).

An unknown author said there are three types of leaders: (1) figurehead leader (name on stationery, but not a leader, and no one is looking); (2) average leader (faithful at worship, takes a visible lead, meets scriptural qualifications, a sincere person of integrity, but no leading nor inspiring and influencing others to follow Christ; and (3) dynamic, spiritual leader who is a devout and conscientious person who seeks passionately to follow his Master and Lord. He inspires others. He is continually growing in knowledge (great library, well-read, up-to-date on current problems in the church). He often has ideas, projects, and works that will help the flock reach heaven. He knows where he is going and others eagerly follow his lead.

A faithful, genuine, scripturally-qualified servant of the Lord in the role of an elder will be a teacher. He will be qualified and knowledgeable in the Word and thus able to teach others one-on-one, in a Bible class, present a sermon, etc. While he will not be overly assertive, he will be ready, willing, and able; because of his passion for truth, he will desire to further the good news of Christ and serve as an example to others.

A faithful elder will be a decision-maker. Occasions will often arise when a decision must be made on material or spiritual matters. What evangelistic work can the congregation financially support, how best to use the Lord's money in works of benevolence, ways to edify the family of God all require a decision by the eldership.

An elder/eldership will need to be a counselor in regard to a troubled marriage, a teen that has made bad decisions in life, conflict between members, etc. To serve as an arbitrator, advisor, or mediator will hopefully bring peace to the flock.

A genuine elder will be a soul-winner. He will love people and seek to encourage and build them up in the faith. He will

love the lost and dying and seek to bring them to Christ. He will be aggressive and zealous to aid and encourage all to be saved, then faithful to their Lord and Master.

An elder will be (if faithful in God's sight) a ruler (Heb. 13:7; Heb. 13:17). He is one who will lead—go before—with authority from the Chief Shepherd as he seeks to oversee and guide the flock toward heaven.

God's servant, an elder, will be an example. Examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3) should reflect his life. All Christians, especially elders, should be an example of the believers (1 Tim. 4:12).

Warnings And Cautions To Those Who Serve As Elders

Warnings are provided from inspired Scripture concerning departing from the truth (2 Tim. 4:1-5; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-32; 2 The. 2:3). This is ever so possible individually as well as congregationally. Elders are charged to watch over the flock and protect them from such departures.

May I offer the following suggestions of warning to those who presently serve or ones considering serving in the capacity of a shepherd:

Work As An Eldership, Not A Single Unit.

God's plan involves a plurality of men serving. Functioning as an eldership prevents one from becoming "the" elder.

Refuse To Allow The Feelings Of Power Or "Lording" Over The Flock.

Understand an elder or eldership serves under Jesus Christ. Humility is a great virtue. One must **never** become so puffed up and feel too important and indispensable.

Practice The Golden Rule (Mat. 7:12).

In every role of service to our Master, the golden rule is crucially important. Especially as an overseer, consider—

before making a decision, reacting to another, speaking, etc.—how would I want another to treat me, how would I like for others to react or speak to me.

Refuse To Make Quick And Impulsive Decisions.

Weigh your thoughts in prayer. Ask God for wisdom. Develop a method of determining the pros and cons about matters. If it is important, it is worthy of careful assessment.

The Congregation's Responsibility To Elders

Every congregation of the Lord's people should desire to reproduce the New Testament church in membership, organization, work, and worship. To have leaders according to God's plan, **there must first be a desire** on the part of those who will serve (1 Tim. 3). To possess a desire to serve does not mean that individual is seeking power, wants to be in control, exert power over others, etc. It merely means he is seeking to be a spiritual servant in any way possible to please his Father. Great leaders do not set out to be leaders; they set out to make a difference. It is never about the role; it is about the goal. The individual will seek Christ first (Mat. 6:33) and himself last. Christ will be his life (Col. 3:4). **Second, there must be training.** On the local level (as well as lectureships, seminars, etc.), there is an urgent need to educate and train men (young ones certainly included) to assist them in being prepared to serve as an elder. **Third, call for them.** James 5:13-16 instructs us to call for the elders at various times in our lives. This would be especially true during times of trial and difficulty. **Fourth, there must be great caution and care in selecting elders.** Obviously, we must follow God's will (qualifications) completely. Sadly, too many congregations have appointed elders to learn abruptly they are not only not qualified, but their leadership would bring destruction. It is better to be scripturally unorganized than unscripturally organized.

When an elder/eldership is appointed to the local congregation, both sides bear grave responsibilities. To reach heaven, to please God, for the local congregation to be governed according to God's design/desire, the eldership must accept and fulfill their responsibilities. Likewise, the members of that congregation have specific duties toward the eldership. The church owes the elders the following: respect, love, appreciation (1 The. 5:12-13), honor (1 Tim. 5:17), submission, and cooperation (Heb. 13:17).

According to the Scriptures, an elder who rules well and labors in the Word and doctrine is "counted worthy of double honour" (1 Tim. 5:17).

Conclusion

A true Shepherd will **speak** in such a way that others love to **listen** to you and **listen** in such a way that others love to **speak** to you. Though not speaking of spiritual matters, John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more—you are a leader." Tragically, there are few qualified, faithful, servants who can and will serve as an elder in the local church.

A faithful elder will recognize that Jesus is **the** only head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Mat. 28:18). In the first century, as well as today, elders are ordained to serve under the Chief Shepherd, in every church (Acts 14:22-23; Acts 20:17; Tit. 1:5). Every elder has the same (equal) authority (1 Tim. 3; Acts 20:28-30). An eldership only has authority over the local congregation (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28).

We must **never** question God's way—it is always right! The form of government for the local congregation has been specified from our Creator. Let us make certain we walk according to our Father's instructions and look forward to receiving the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Adultery

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Adultery is a sin,
that like ripples on water,
Reverberates ever outward,
Touching many lives-
More often than not,
affecting generations. (Lester)

Few things are more painful and heartbreaking within the bonds of marriage than the sin of adultery. When God declared it was not good for man to be alone, made a suitable mate for him, and gave the woman to Adam, He instituted marriage and created a relationship and bond like no other

(KJV, Gen. 2:18-25). The marital relationship between a husband and wife is sacred; it always has been and always will be. It is not practical to believe that anyone wakes up one day and plans to destroy his family by having an extra-marital affair. Sadly, adultery happens, and Satan is destroying families and lives with its lure. Understanding what adultery is and is not, how to avoid it, and how to survive it will be discussed.

What Is Adultery?

God's Definition

Society may try to trivialize what adultery actually is, but God does not. God has always been clear on His expectation to keep the marriage bed honorable and the bond between a man and his wife pure. God provides for the sexual relationship in marriage. In the Genesis account, God's declaration that "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) implies that aloneness, both physically and sexually, is healed in marriage. Fulfilling these needs outside of one's own marriage is sin and is defined by the term *adultery*.

Society has offered substitute terms in place of *adultery*. It prefers terms such as "affair," "dalliance," "indiscretion," "one-night stand," "philander" and "womanizer" to denote bad character and disapproval (Perel, "The Language"). However, this 'softening' of what is truly a grievous sin cannot be called anything other than what it is: adultery. There should be no confusion. Adultery is sexual immorality. The Greek word used for this form of immorality is *porneia*, which means "any illicit act of sex" (Vine). Thus, adultery is the act of sexual immorality between two persons, at least one of which is married to someone else. In layman's terms, adultery is the act of sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse. Adultery is a sub-category of fornication.

Fornication is unlawful (sinful) sex. Adultery is unlawful sex in which at least one of the parties is married to someone else. Homosexuality and bestiality are also forms of fornication and are grounds for divorce according to Matthew 19:9.

While defining adultery, it is important that we notice the words of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:9, our Lord said, “Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” In a parallel passage in Matthew 5:32, He stated, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.” It should be noted that if one divorces his/her spouse for a reason other than fornication and marries someone else, he is guilty of adultery. It should be further noted that the person that he marries is **also** guilty of adultery. The only reason one may divorce his spouse and remarry with God’s approval is fornication.

Let us also consider “adultery of the heart.” Though not grounds for divorce, as it is not fornication, a man can be guilty of committing adultery in his heart through the process of lusting. Jesus warned, “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mat. 5:27-28). Jesus is clarifying that though one may stop short of the actual physical act, he may still be guilty of sin in his heart. A man may commit a sin in his mind without ever engaging in the actual activity. The Pharisees believed that so long as one stopped short of the physical act, he was clear of sin. Jesus emphatically teaches this is hypocritical and wrong. Too often what begins in the heart leads one to

the action itself. We recall that in Genesis 3, Eve saw the fruit (desired), that it was good for food (lust) and to make one wise (more lust), then she took and ate. When she reached, she sinned! Not respecting God's boundaries leads to sin. The Proverbs writer stated, "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (Pro. 6:32).

God's Rules Concerning Adultery

Adultery will cause cataclysmic destruction to families, children, parents and in-laws, neighbors, friends, and even the church. God understood this from the beginning when He gave the law to Moses as recorded in Exodus 20:14, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The priests were commanded to address adulterous situations promptly: "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10). God reiterated His command in the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy 5:18, "Neither shalt thou commit adultery."

God understood the danger of this sin as one in which the physical body is used in the act because He warned Christians to "[f]lee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body, but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18). When a man and a woman marry, they become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Adultery violates that bond.

God has ordained the husband-wife relationship to be above all others because it is primary to all aspects of family. A man and woman have each other in the sense that each is a gift of God to the other. When this is spoiled by sin, the results are always bad. The book of Genesis records one account in which a family suffered the poor decisions of a

spouse who perverted His Word. According to Genesis 16, Sarah, with her husband Abraham, refused to trust God and gave Hagar, her handmaid, to lay with Abraham to have a child (Gen. 16:3). This perversion caused suffering for all involved. Abraham suffered along with Ishmael, who was an illegitimate son because he did not possess the birthright and was not the child of promise (Gen. 17:19). Hagar suffered because Sarah sent her away after she was given to Abraham. Sarah brought suffering upon Abraham, Hagar, Isaac, Ishmael, and even herself. It is appropriate here to discuss the false view of adultery as “having your cake and eating it, too.” Just as Sarah did not have the right to give Hagar to Abraham, he did not have the right to take her. At the time did Sarah really “have” Hagar? Hagar was Sarah’s handmaiden (servant), and Hagar did not choose to be given to Abraham. She was treated as mere property of Sarah’s to do as she pleased. Just as in any marriage today, we do not “have” our spouse to use or neglect at will (Owens 91). In fact, most adulterous relationships do not occur with a serial philanderer. It is most often those who have been married 20 or 30 years or longer who agonizingly struggle and hurt over their infidelity (Perel, “State of Affairs”).

God has made it possible for us to become good stewards of each other by commanding, “[h]usbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). If this is the type of unselfish love that Jesus gives to his church, then the husband must work to give up as much of himself for his spouse. Further, the wife must submit to her husband, respecting his spiritual headship. God desires for a husband to dwell with his wife “according to knowledge” (1 Pet 3:7) and to honor her as the weaker vessel. She is to follow the reverent respect shown by Sarah for Abraham in calling him Lord (1 Pet 3:6).

Planting The Seeds

Witnessing the harm of adultery when counseling Christian couples is painful. It would be of great benefit to help couples better understand and handle the dangers of adultery before marriage. Young people must learn in their later teen years that marriage is not to be taken lightly; it is a promise one makes to God, self, and spouse. God does expect us to keep our word. When one says I do, he makes a promise to God. It is deeply disheartening that many want to change the wedding vows of “honor and obey” to make them fit modern interpretation. But God said let your “yes be yes and your no be no” (NKJV, Mat. 5:37). Thus, God expects all aspects of marriage—loyalty, affection, honesty, patience, fidelity, and kindness—to be encompassed with a love that believeth all things, hopeth all things and endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:7). This huge order, coming directly from God, is often difficult when adultery has broken marriage’s sacred trust. Pulling the relationship back together after infidelity is just not possible without His help, but it is possible with His help (Mat. 19:26; Mark 10:27). God wants to be there for His children through every storm, even ones that are self-inflicted. The devil is working to destroy what God wants to build in our lives since he is the father of deceit (John 8:44).

One way the devil is deceptively destroying marriages is with husbands who incorrectly fulfill their roles, either by compromising it or by being too domineering (Owens). Neither of these approaches works better than God’s ideal design for marriage. God says the husband is the head of the wife (Eph. 5:23) and by extension his household. It is not right for men to debate, vote, or delegate the leading of his family to his wife; that is his God-given role. The husband is to lead and the wife is to follow her husband as she follows God (Eph. 5:22). Roles are important. As Eric Owens states,

If there are not roles because we are one in Christ; then once a teenager is baptized he or she is now the peer with the parents. No reasonable parent would agree with that statement. It is reasonable to conclude God understands what he wants in marriage relationships. (59)

Men not leading in their homes is a way Satan is slowly destroying homes and marriages.

This writer has personally experienced growing up in a home with an adulterous father. Growing up in a household where mom worked hard and dad did whatever he desired with other women has affected my family and siblings for a lifetime. The blessing of now having a spouse that loves God more than she loves me is an indescribable joy. God understands that mankind is not perfect, but thanks be to Him for his perfect love, grace, and mercy. It is inevitable that problems will arise in marriages; yet God is always there helping to overcome any obstacle if one would trust Him and lean on His wisdom.

Marriage requires sacrifice, patience, perseverance, and humility. These make a stronger bond because one sees that a person will change with the right incentive. God is the greatest incentive to change one's self to make the life of one's spouse better. Unselfish virtue is a rare quality that must be resurrected if future marriages are to be built strongly on the foundations of the marriages laid today.

Society's Condemning Attitude On Adultery

Adultery is wicked, destructive, and God hates it. While we do not deny these facts, society's negative views of it are oftentimes skewed. Adultery, especially in the case of the

husband being involved in the affair, can and often leads to rejection by his spouse. Our society believes the idea that if a man “cheats once, he will always cheat.” We even have television shows where catching a cheating spouse “in the very act of adultery” is the sum of the show plot. Yet the fact is that very few spouses who have been involved in affairs ever repeat the behavior (Perel). Yet the question must be asked, Should I leave or stay? The idea of a woman automatically leaving her husband after he cheats is very common today in 2016, much more so than fifty years ago. While we understand that God allows a woman to divorce her husband who is guilty of adultery, such is not mandatory. She may choose to save the marriage.

Perhaps women who are victims of adultery are more likely to terminate their marriages today than they were in the past because of their economic power. Women can leave and support themselves and their children and the husband’s lack of financial support is no longer the chief reason for staying in the relationship.

In recent years, there is also the stigma of perceived weakness as a woman.

Today in western society there is more stigma towards one who stays in a marriage when the spouse has been discovered involved in an affair and you had the opportunity to leave. It somehow means you are now, or were then, complicit in the act. (Perel, “State of Affairs”)

This has even been seen in the political realm with former Senator turned Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

Mrs. Clinton received (and still receives) backlash from women who see her as “weak” because she stayed with former President Bill Clinton, after more than one affair, when she could have left. While there are many things this writer would take issue with Secretary Clinton on politically, condemning her for not ending her marriage is not one of them. An adulterous affair does not automatically require the non-offending spouse to leave or divorce the offending spouse.

Adultery, as with all sexual sin, has an element of salaciousness. Christians do not have the luxury of falling into the trap of listening to gossip, slander, or ridicule of one guilty of adultery, nor should they be guilty themselves of wanting to know or feeling they having a right to know the whole “truth.” The Bible teaches “be careful and take heed lest ye fall” (1 Cor. 10:12) whether it is in restoring a brother or sister or that we “bear one another’s burdens” even ones we may not feel are clean enough to bear (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:17). This is especially true when a preacher or elder is involved in an adulterous affair. It is believed by this writer that some members of the Lord’s body will go out of their way to exact their own measure of penance from fallen leaders because they feel he should have known better. Yet when the master teacher, Jesus, encountered a woman who was brought to him by the Pharisees as one caught in the very act of adultery, He did not cringe with disdain. He did identify her behavior as sin. He did tell her to cease such activity. And He did point out the hypocrisy of those men who set the trap by stating, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). Many times we are harder on people than the Lord is. Notably, the accusers all dropped their stones and walked away. To condemn the woman with no accusers would have violated the law. What a lesson of mercy and

grace is found in the Lord's eyes and also in the eyes of those who walked away. This lesson is needed in helping those in the devastation of adultery to recover.

Your Sins Will Find You Out

One hallmark of adulterous relationships is that they are most often secret and clandestine meetings. By secrecy, the sin of adultery remains an unbreakable chain to self-will and selfishness. This may be part of the attraction: doing something with someone unknown. However, the devil is our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8) and knows this magnetism of man to the forbidden. In the account of King David and his affair with Bathsheba, one of the prominent elements is the immense deception (2 Samuel 11). Certainly David never envisioned his one sin of lust would lead to multiple other sins of lying, scheming to cover-up Bathsheba's pregnancy, and murdering Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11:2-17). But he thought he had secrecy.

Some counselors and psychotherapists indicate that the secrecy of the affair keeps it going. This secrecy helps the adulterer avoid the heavy weight of pain that admitting his sin would cause to the spouse, their family, the church, work, and community (Perel, "State of Affairs"). Yet sins done in secrecy will always come to the light, "For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light" (ASV, Mark 4:22).

Perhaps the most prominent example is the Canadian-based website *AshleyMadison.com* whose advertising slogan is, "Life is short. Have an affair!" This notorious facilitator of married people engaging in adulterous affairs had its databases hacked and thousands of its confidential users' identities published on the Internet for the world to see. The

saying of Moses is true, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

Often in an affair, one thinks he controls things that are not actually in their control. How many women who signed up “to look for possible liaisons” were surprised to find themselves bombarded with hundreds of requests from men? Ironically, the site was targeted by a group of computer hackers in retaliation for a practice of *AshleyMadison.com*; the site created computer-generated female profiles, not real women, with the goal of inflating the number of actual women on the site who were responding to the male profiles with uncontrolled abandon. Yet the paradox of a website designed to facilitate lying and cheating on one’s marriage that then engages in the practice of lying and cheating its customers out of their money is not lost. The court case and lawsuit has made headlines this month further by the judge in the case requiring the plaintiffs give up their names as part of the public record. The class action group had up to this point been allowed to keep their names anonymous but since this requirement, many have dropped their suit for fear of reprisals from employers, friends, organizations, and angry spouses (Goldman). Truly, there is no secrecy in sin.

Possible Reasons For Adultery

It’s no secret the way our society views gender roles has changed in the Twenty-first century. What was once taught and perceived as reality fifty years ago is not viewed the same in 2016. Are we okay with this shift or are certain values in marriage timeless?” (“Battle of the Sexes”)

To address the cultural, social, economic, and emotional reasons for an affair, it could be helpful to consider what one thinks is gained in an affair. All sin has a component of pleasure and perceived reward. If one adds the physical component of extreme pleasure to the euphoria of newness, he is destined to find an irresistible cocktail of debauchery. With all the damage at stake, why do some still do it?

The Reward Of No Emotional Attachment

For some men, emotional freedom is a powerful aphrodisiac; literally, there is no need to care for the partner emotionally. Her feelings do not matter because it is a mutual transaction between two people for physical, hedonistic reasons alone. Pleasure is the only currency of exchange in this market place; there are no false ideas or pretense that he will call the next day to go out together for a proper date. Courting, caring, and having an emotional presence in a relationship are not even considered. The man does not have to be a good listener, provider, sounding board, or anything else. It is a totally self-focused act without connection. This may seem unbelievable, yet many women in prostitution know well the “creed that men do not pay them for sex; they pay them to leave” (Weiner-Davis).

A Near-Certain Sexual Encounter

Another appealing aspect of an affair is that sex is almost always a certainty; there is no waiting period or trial run or emotional probation to complete. Here is a common scenario in marriage: A husband calls during the day to remind his wife she said, “Maybe later.” He sends sweet texts all day. He gets home and does the laundry, puts the kids to bed

early and after he does all these things is showered and ready for intimate time with his wife. She says, I'm tired, I have a headache, I'm bored, hungry, cold or not feeling it and says maybe tomorrow please. He may think okay, I will wait; but if this persists, he will be convinced it is just too much work. This is not true in the affair; he is given what he wants, when he wants, and anytime he wants (Perel, "State of Affairs").

Rewards Outside A Given Role

A wife often finds reward in leaving the role of homemaker; the fantasy of someone taking her away from crying babies, toilets, laundry and cooking [is appealing]. These [repetitive chores] are all like cold water on a loving, sexual fire. Alternatively, an affair is an opportunity for freedom from guilt of doing something nice for herself because as a mother she is expected to put everyone else first. This [new] man can take care of her now. She does not have to think or do anything; she can just be pampered. It means she is young, vibrant, desirable and she feels alive. She, like millions of other women who have read the "*Fifty Shades of Grey*" trilogy imagine that having someone totally focused on her (not violence) who does not have to be

told what to do, allows her to lose herself in the abandon of the moment. There is no guilt because in this space, she is not a mother or wife or a responsible daughter; she is free to explore whatever, whenever, and however she feels or does not feel. She does not have the slightest care for his ego or anxiety because now it is totally for her. (Perel, “State of Affairs”)

Living Vicariously Through Social Media

There may also be a component of vicarious liaisons on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, email, and Skype. A spouse looks up an old flame and has an electronic conversation or just sees what they look like. It is human to be tempted by what one remembers. While it is almost always the case that you cannot go back in time, the appeal of interaction and remembering is a powerful one. Before long the conversations on social media, because of anonymity, may reveal too much personal information, say things one normally would not say, or become some persona very different from the present reality. Satan uses the desire for intimacy and connection to lead one on a path towards infidelity.

Pornography

The power of pornography may be another problem in adultery. Pornography heightens all these elements with visual stimuli or a steamy chat room encounter that invades the physical body, although the person is alone. It is a trigger of the same pleasure sensors as physical sex when

one watches explicit videos or images, yet it is crippling because of the impossible variety and speed of stimuli in pornography. It leaves the person ever seeking greater and more prolonged arousal. (Wilson)

Adultery's Effect On The Family

Adultery can do irreparable damage to the family. If children know a parent has been unfaithful, the son of a father may wonder if he will be the same. Or the daughter of a mother involved in an affair will question how she views herself in light of her mother's cheating (Weiner-Davis).

Sometimes children are used as sounding boards by the harmed parent to spill out all the sordid details of the affair. What is the reason given? The hurting parent feels the daughter or son should know about the adulterous parent's despicable actions. It is nearly impossible for a parent to keep a child completely shielded from the affair of a parent, especially if the marriage dissolves (Perel, "State of Affairs").

The Golden Rule declares one must treat others as we would have them treat us (Mat 7:12). This is especially hard for a spouse who has been hurt by marital unfaithfulness. At times each family member will experience pain and heartache; but there can be times of healing and embracing when an affair is ended. Obviously, there must be deep contrition and resolve and even deeper forgiveness. This writer believes Psalm 51 may be David's deep sorrow and regret for his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and ultimately his sin of murder and the consequences that followed. One must think and act with incredible restraint and compassion toward an adulterous spouse and the other person involved. It may have heavenly ramifications.

Adultery Does Not Define A Person.

Adultery and its effects are devastating and destructive and may leave a person feeling that this is the end of her life. She may have thought her marriage was perfect, one that the couple's friends told them would never break. Then like the *Titanic* it all went down to the bottom of the ocean never to be seen or heard from again. The wronged spouse, the one not involved in the affair, may think of self as a perfect spouse and parent with the perfect career, but because of the affair, is now a fraud. This thinking is not found in West African, Latin, and Israeli cultures; it is conspicuous to Western culture. This is not the healthiest mental state for growth and healing. Such a one needs to realize that forgiveness from God and a subsequent life of godliness is achievable. There is life after adultery. Luke 15 records the young son was doing the most humiliating work for a Jewish male—feeding pigs—after wasting his inheritance. In this place of squalor something profound occurred to him. He was more than someone who ruined his life or someone betrayed by disloyal friends or/and even someone who was a selfish ungrateful son who brought this on himself (Luke 15:15-17). He began to see he was offspring of a king with value and worth, and his father loved him. His father would give the younger son a place of honor because he was family. Although this son thought it would require a great speech or act of attrition, his father did not refuse him. He ran to him, fell on him with hugs, and kissed him. He restored him with sandals, a ring, and a cloak on the outside, but the gift of restored love in him was an even greater restoration (Luke 15:21-25). Repentance for one caught in adultery must entail a “coming to self” moment. The sinner must decide who he is, whose he is, and run to his spouse prepared to beg for forgiveness. While the end result may or may not be reconciliation like with the son in Luke

15, recognition of who you belong to and true repentance must lead the way in the healing process.

It Is Not Just Sex

Adultery is rarely strictly about the physical sexual act. Here are some practical things to consider in your own marriage about sex:

Know what your spouse's needs are when it comes to relating to them sexually. You are the one person privy to the ins and outs of your spouse: their moods, dreams, and desires (Weiner-Davis). The Bible says the way of a man with a woman is a mysterious marvel (Pro. 30:18-19). The command of Peter to husbands about how to know their wives cannot be over-emphasized. He says to dwell with her "according to knowledge" (1 Pet. 3:7). It is vitally important to be present with your spouse; that is, when you are with them, be in the moment, listen to the cues, especially non-verbal ones. Eric Owens put it this way:

If you hope to have better relationships, then you must answer this question. Don't answer quickly without thought. Think about the question and examine the evidence of your life then answer. Here is the question. Do you love yourself? If you love who you are, if you love you, then you can love others. Loving others won't diminish you. Loving others won't cause you to resent them. Failure to love yourself will do both. The proper order is to love God, love yourself, then love others. Do I love myself? is the key to all other relationships. (Text)

If your partner is yearning for sexual fulfilment, do not minimize it and think “Well, it’s just sex, what is the big deal?” (Weiner-Davis). To your husband or wife, it is connection, love, thoughts, smells, courtship, and affection. It has been said that when one is rejected by a spouse, the loneliest place on earth is lying there in bed staring up at the ceiling, listening to the sound of your wife or husband sleeping (Weiner-Davis). This is why God commands in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 that the separation from sex in a marriage is a mutual decision and only for a time. God understands some things about us. When a Christian fully knows God, he will not allow the devil to use him against the spouse. It is utterly selfish and thoughtless to trivialize what sex may mean to your spouse.

When you acknowledge your partner’s needs, you do not have to fully understand the depth and root of their emotional desire, needs, and frustrations. Remember, your body is not your own (1 Cor. 7:4). This means you make the choice to mutually take care of one another. This often results in the other spouse being nicer and more thoughtful. It may result in greater openness and communication. It will definitely assist in keeping those [sexual] needs from being met by someone outside of the relationship (Weiner-Davis).

Practical Advice To Prevent Affairs

It is always a good practice not to engage in intimate, emotional conversation with the opposite sex. Co-workers, acquaintances, and friends of the opposite sex should not be allowed into the marriage bed by sharing personal and emotional thoughts with them. There may be times when an attraction develops between you or your spouse for another person. Talk with your spouse and do not act on this feeling.

Avoid one-on-one meetings and lunches and Bible studies or counseling with someone who flirts, overly admires, or gives some other indication of interest in you. One thing to do to address this is to include your spouse in any outings or possible alone-time with the opposite gender. Be above reproach at all times and do not allow the opportunity for sin to take hold (Gen. 4:5-7).

If you have problems communicating with your spouse, talk with a friend of the same sex, perhaps an elder or preacher. A professional counselor or a spiritually mature brother or sister may be able to offer perspective and tools to stop the process of attraction from going further so you avoid getting inappropriately close to someone who is not your wife or husband. Avoid relationship talk with others in general because it may lead to salacious conversation. In the church, a sister may avoid temptation by having a third party—perhaps one or more of the elders—present for counseling with a preacher.

Christians do not have the luxury of ignorance in our society. The account of one preacher who became involved with a wife whom he was giving marriage counseling is a cautionary tale. The preacher and the woman had an ongoing affair and he prevented the husband from taking a new job and moving with his wife by advising them it was a bad idea. Later, the husband found out his wife and the preacher were having an affair and sued the church because of the unprofessional conduct of the minister.

Conclusion

There are no unharmed parties in adultery. The roles of a husband and wife are clearly defined in God's Word and it would benefit all to stay within its confines. God, at all times, must be the guide in governing our every desire.

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Faithful Unto Death: Christianity Is Not For The Faint Of Heart

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It is always a genuine joy to participate in the Power Lectureship. The Southaven congregation has a long and storied history of faithfulness. Her desire to share and spread God's word with the lost provides a worthy example to emulate. My prayer is that she will continue to let her light shine and provide a way for the lost to find their Savior.

Her concern for the lost is rivaled only by her desire to edify the saved. Our topic is one illustration of the desire to build up God's people in the most holy faith. The title "Christianity is not for the Faint of Heart" is a warning to those who seek to enter the kingdom and a reminder to those who have pledged their allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Defining Our Terms

The word *Christian* means a follower of Jesus Christ. The religion of Christianity is the revelation God provided through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, as promised by Christ, guided the apostles into all truth (KJV, John 16:13). They spoke and wrote God's revealed Word (Mat. 10:16-20). It is the doctrine of Christ which we are not to add to or take from (Rev. 22:18-19). Instead, according to 2 John 1:9-11, we are to continue in it and avoid those who err from it. It is the faith for which Jude says we are to earnestly contend (Jude 3). It is the mind of God revealed to man (1 Cor. 2:8-13).

The religion of Christianity is not of man; it is God's religion. Scripture produces Christianity (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul professed before rulers that Christianity is not a sect (Acts 24:14-15). He desired that all men would become as he was—a Christian (Acts 26:26-28). Peter assured his audience that neither he nor they had followed cunningly devised fables when he made known the power and coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:16-18). But the things he preached were supported by prophecy and inspired by God (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Christianity is the religion of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Christ-shed blood bought our pardon, and His life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection produced Christianity. Christ's religion is contained in the 27 books of the New Testament. Christianity is the end of God's mystery and the only religion that can accurately claim to complete Scripture. The Old Testament is completed in the New Testament. The prophets spoke of Christ and Christ is the fulfillment of their message (Luke 24:44-49). Because Christ fulfilled the Old Covenant, He was able to take it out of the way and nail it to His cross (Col. 2:14). Thus, Christ became the mediator of the New Covenant which was established

upon better promises (Heb. 8:1-13). The saints were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Christian is the new name God gave (Isa. 62:1-2). Christianity is pure religion. Peter says one can suffer as a Christian, and if we do suffer for Christ, we should not be ashamed (1 Pet. 4:16).

Christianity stood out in the first-century world; it exposed the errors of the sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees. It shed the light of God's Word on paganism and exposed the foolishness of idolatry. It fulfilled Moses' law and finished the mystery of God. Paul took the religion of Christianity all over the world and Christians were produced everywhere the gospel was obeyed. Christ's religion remains as distinct today as it was when first revealed over 2,000 years ago. It is the good news of Jesus Christ, the only hope of humanity. When the gospel is obeyed, Christians are produced. This is the religion of which we speak.

Faint

The word *faint* is used a variety of ways in both testaments. One way is found in Genesis 25:29, "And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint." According to Strong's, the word *faint* means "languid" ("Ayeph"); it is also rendered, faint, thirsty, and weary. Webster's defines *languid* as "showing or having very little strength, energy, or activity." Esau described his condition as near death.

This word has many other uses in Scripture, most having a similar meaning. Another such is found in Deuteronomy 20:8; the passage is in a context of men going to war. Instances are given of individuals who will be exempted. They include those who had bought a vineyard and had not eaten of it (Deu. 20:6) and those who had betrothed a wife and had not taken her (Deu. 20:7). This context leads to the following: "And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall

say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart" (Deu. 20:8).

The idea of what is involved is clear and addresses the idea behind our title. This individual is first fearful and afraid and that moves him to be fainthearted. The heart is considered the innermost organ of the man. It is his mind and from his heart, he decides, feels, and acts. Strong defines this *faint* as "A primitive root; to soften (intransitively or transitively), used figuratively: - (be) faint ([-hearted]), mollify, (be, make) soft (-er), be tender" ("Rakak").

God through Moses is clearly concerned about such a man because his heart will cause the heart of his brethren to faint. Interestingly, the word *faint* here is not same word; in fact, it is neither of the above words. Strong's says this word is "A primitive root; to liquefy; figuratively to waste (with disease), to faint (with fatigue, fear or grief): - discourage, faint, be loosed, melt (away), refuse, X utterly" ("Masas").

The man who is fainthearted will cause the hearts of his brethren to liquefy. Such would have devastating consequences when Israel went to war. It was far better for any such men to stay home and avoid the battlefield.

In the New Testament, the word *faint* occurs often with different shades of meaning as well. One passage that is in line with the statement of our title is Luke 18:1, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Strong's says this word means "to be (bad or) weak, that is, (by implication) to fail (in heart) ("ἐκκακέω"). Paul used this same word in 2 Corinthians 4:1, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not."

Putting the thoughts together we might say the religion of Christ is not for those who will lose heart and fail to

continue. Such does not mean that one cannot or will not become tired. A faithful child of God can certainly become tired of the evil in the world. Peter said that Lot's righteous soul was vexed from day to day by the ongoing evil of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Lot did not faint, but he was vexed; in fact, Lot was one of three faithful people who escaped the judgment of the wicked cities.

Neither does it mean one could not become discouraged. The prophets were frequently discouraged by the effects of the nations around them on God's nation. They lamented the state of God's nation as it became more and more like the nations around them. They often felt as if they were underachieving and wondered if they were making any difference. Surely, a faithful child of God could feel a similar plight today. Elders, gospel preachers, and saints can all be discouraged sometimes. One is not fainting when he laments the intrusion of wickedness into God's kingdom. Paul wanted to know that he had not labored in vain. The church is under attack and it seems sometimes like the world is winning the day. This is lamentable to the faithful but though discouraged, they are not fainting.

Additionally, it does not mean one cannot be depressed. Sometimes ascending the mountain of victory can be followed by time in the valley of discouragement and depression. Elijah was certainly a faithful child of God—obviously not a Christian, but a faithful child of God. The great victory he wrought on Mount Carmel was followed by the great low of fleeing to a cave and pleading for God to take his life (1 Kin. 18-19). It would not be proper to suggest that Elijah was fainthearted, but he was certainly down for a while. Christians who find themselves down, discouraged, or even depressed should not think such means they have fainted.

Still, Christianity is not for the faint of heart, mainly because it takes great courage to believe what Christians believe.

You Believe What?

Christians can sometimes lose focus or be lulled to sleep or sink into a state of apathy. Maybe it is more accurate to say that the world can so influence us as to cause us to forget who we are, whose we are, and in what we are engaged. We can be conformed to the world around us and forget we are soldiers behind enemy lines (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Christians are people who have been called out of the world by the gospel of Jesus Christ and into the kingdom of God's dear son. But this simple sentence says so much about the saints' reality. Christians are people who believe in the God of heaven and earth. We believe that He is the infinite creator, ruler, self-sufficient, all-knowing, only true, living God. He has no equal and there is no rival to His majesty, glory, and honor. Christians believe that the Godhead consists of the Father, Word, and the Holy Spirit. The Word was made flesh and was born of a virgin and that in the flesh, He was God with us (John 1:14).

We believe that Christ died, was buried, and rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Christians believe that the Holy Spirit came and empowered the apostles and prophets to preach, teach, and write God's inspired Word (John 16:7; Acts 2:1-4). The product of the Spirit's work is the Holy Scriptures, plenary, verbally inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Christians believe that Christ built one church. The prophets prophesied He would (Isa. 2:1-4; Dan. 2:44-45) and Christ promised the same (Mat. 16:18-19). The church of Christ is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), the family of

God (Eph. 3:15), the redeemed, purchased possession of God (Acts 20:28). The church is the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:9-11). The church is the place where God is glorified (Eph. 3:20-21). The church is where all men are reconciled to God through Christ (Eph. 2:11-16). The church is the body of Christ, and He is her head, husband, and Savior (Eph. 1:20-21; Eph. 5:22-25). Scripture affirms and we believe that there is one body and that the church is that body (Eph. 4:4-6). Christians believe denominational division is sinful and contrary to the plan of God, the prayer of Christ, and the revelation of the Spirit (John 17; 1 Cor. 1:10-17).

Christians believe that the gospel is God's power unto salvation for all men (Rom. 1:16-17). The gospel is the good news and necessary news because of sin. Christians believe all men are under sin and are in need of salvation and a Savior (Rom. 1-3). Christians believe sin exists and is committed by the will of men and not inherited from Adam (Jam. 1:13-15; Eze. 18:4). Sin is the transgression of Divine Law and thus deserves and will be punished (1 John 3:4).

We believe that God created the world in six literal days (Gen. 1; Exo. 20:11). This creation is under the rule of God and man is subject to God. Christians believe that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and that human life is sacred expressly because humanity shares the image of God (Gen. 9:6). Thus, Christians believe it is against God and sinful to murder human life (Pro. 6:16-17).

Christians believe God is the absolute perfect good, that the nature of God is absolute, and the character of God is perfectly holy, just, and good. As John wrote, we believe that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Like John, we believe that if one will not admit his sin, he cannot have fellowship with God (1 John 1:6). Christians believe that because God is the absolute good we can know

when something is not good. Since God is truth and God revealed truth, Christians believe we can know the truth and thus be made free (John 8:31-32); Christians believe God's Word is truth (John 17:17).

Christians believe Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Jesus Christ is not one option of many. Christians believe that the Word is the Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus is the child of God produced by the virgin (Mat. 1:18-25). Christ and Christ alone is the one we must hear and the One in Whom the Father is well pleased (Mat. 17:5). Christ is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Christ is the good shepherd, the way, the door, the vine, the bread of heaven, and the water of life. His blood is the only appeasement for God's wrath; He is the Christian's high priest, law-giver, and king. His blood is the only thing Jehovah will accept as an atonement for sin (Heb. 9:24-10:14). If one is a Christian, he cannot believe in any other way but Jesus. Christians believe all who will not confess, submit to, and obey Jesus will be eternally lost (John 12:48).

Christians believe God created humanity male and female and gave us the glorious, wonderful relationship of marriage (Gen. 2:18-25). Christians believe humans are to have one mate at a time for life and that mate is to be the opposite sex only (Mat. 19:1-12). Christians believe that humans are to be married for life and not divorce except for fornication. The words *till death do us part* are precisely God's intention for marriage. Christians believe that marriage typifies Christ's relationship with His church. He is the husband and He has only one bride (Eph. 5:22-32). Christians believe that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves His church and that wives are to reverence their husbands as the church does Christ. Christians believe the

husband and wife each have a role to perform in marriage. The husband is the head of the wife and leads her as Christ does the church, and the wife submits to her husband and follows him as the church does Christ.

Christians believe in heaven and hell as the eternal rewards and punishment of the righteous and wicked. Christians believe that our souls are eternal, and thus we will live after death eternally. There is a waiting place for the souls of men and the soul of everyone who dies inhabits this place. Christians believe the account of Luke 16:19-31 is an inspired account of life after death. The soul awaits the return of the Lord and the end of the world at which time all men will be judged and sentenced eternally. Christ is the One before Whom we must stand; we will bow and we will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10).

In light of all of this, Christians believe this world is the temporary place of soul's preparing for eternity. Those who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ and are faithful to Him will be blessed after death to live with Him eternally at His return (2 The. 3:13-18) while those who reject him, His Word, and gospel will be lost eternally (John 12:48; 2 The. 1:7-9).

These Beliefs Are Not For The Faint Of Heart

As Christians we must recall what we believe, why we believe it, and the implications of those beliefs. Given these beliefs, it is not difficult to see that anyone holding these beliefs, professing these beliefs, attempting to live these beliefs, and propagating these beliefs will run afoul of our country and culture.

One of the things it means is Christians cannot be friends of the world (Jam. 4:1-4). Christians cannot be friends with or condone actions and people who oppose God. Christ will not allow us to hold His hand and hold onto the world

(Mat. 12:30). We can have Jesus or we can have Satan, sin, and self, but we cannot have both (Rom. 6:16-17). The world wants us to have a Christianity that allows us to be alright with and even accepting of sin; this will not work with God. Paul tells us that God gave the world up because of sin. Romans 1:18-32 details God's position and actions toward sin. The chapter concludes with this sober warning, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). Being a Christian means we cannot be friends with the world and friends of God.

These beliefs mean we must oppose things that are contrary to God and Christ. The war for minds is won through the propagation of ideas. These ideas are disseminated through teaching. All forms of media—television, internet, movies, magazines, and books—are used in this war. All kinds of people are involved: friends, co-workers, family, teachers, actors, news broadcasters, politicians, and more. God is also desirous of our minds and what we think. He desires to teach us of His ways so we can walk in His paths. Jesus invites us to come to Him not simply to have our burdens lightened, but also to learn of Him (Mat. 11:28-30). The things Christians learn and believe from God put them in direct opposition to the things taught by the world which opposes God. Scripture used the analogy of soldiers engaged in a war to arrest our minds as to what is actually at stake. Consider Paul's words to the Ephesians:

This I say therefore, and testify in the
Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as
other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of
their mind, Having the understanding

darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:17-24).

Christians are people who were once without God; we walked in the futility of our minds in our own ignorance and were blind to God. Having heard the gospel, believed the gospel, and obeyed the gospel, Christians have been bought by the blood of Christ and undergone the operation of God. Thus born again, we become new creations. Part of this amazing transformation occurs in our minds. The once dark, ignorant, vain mind has been renewed through Christ's teaching. This new man cannot now continue to live the life he once lived. He cannot endorse the things he once endorsed; he cannot find joy in sin as he once did. He now knows the terrible consequences of his former life and must as a Christian oppose the ideas and doctrines that put others into the same bondage. The beliefs of a Christian mean he must oppose his former life and those who still live in darkness.

The severity of these opposing views is seen when Paul talks to Timothy.

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. (2 Tim. 2:3-5)

Consider the soberness of being called a soldier at war. Souls are at stake—ours and those we are trying to save.

Opposition Will Come And Christians Must Endure

Christ warns those who would follow him that His religion is not for the faint of heart. Ultimately the one who faints, quits. And if the New Testament of Jesus Christ teaches Christians anything, it is to be faithful, continue on, and persevere. Fainting is simply not an option. The exhortations are almost always positive in nature, exhorting us to continue. Consider several words and phrases; the number could be multiplied many times over.

Christianity is not simply about taking a stand; it is about standing for the position you have taken. When reading through the New Testament, we find that no writer addresses the opposition the saints experience with shock or amazement. James said Christians should “count it all joy” when they fall into diverse trials (Jam. 1:2). Consider Peter’s words of exhortation to his audience. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But

rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13). Paul urges that anyone who lives godly will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). If light remains light, it must oppose darkness; if good remains good, evil must be bothered by it. If God remains God, all who choose Him must be opposed by all those who choose to live against him.

The existence of truth necessitates sides, and such has been the experience of the faithful in both Testaments. Cain was of the wicked one, so he did not love his righteous brother (1 John 3:11-12). The whole world was given to sin, but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). This sentiment continues throughout the Old Testament, into the New Testament, and even to today.

The church began with favor with all of the people (Acts 2:42-47), but it was not long before the apostles were arrested, charged, threatened, beaten, and eventually killed (Acts 4-7). The New Testament writers understood well the world in which they lived would take one of two approaches to the gospel they preached. Then as now, men gladly received it and obeyed it or they angrily rejected it (Acts 2:41; Acts 5:33).

Thus, Inspiration's instruction and exhortation to saints is to persevere, do not lose heart, and do not faint. Following is just a sampling of passages exhorting saints to endure. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mat. 24:13). "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Mark 13:13). "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure"

(2 The. 1:4). “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3). “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (Jam. 5:11). “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Peter 2:19). All of these passages and the more that could be added continually emphasize one thing: Christians must endure.

Reasons Christians Cannot Faint

God Is Greater Than Satan.

God’s way will be victorious; to faint would be to leave the Lord and side with the world. The world can do nothing to the faithful that should cause us to faint. There is no challenge to the infinite God of heaven. The world will try to quiet God’s people; the apostles were threatened and Christians will endure threats today.

Christ Did Not Faint.

The Lord was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among men. He was lied about, attacked, beaten, mocked, and eventually crucified. Yet, Christ did not faint. He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Yet, the Lord went through the garden and to the cross.

The exhortation of the Hebrews writer is a clarion call to all Christians.

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Heb. 12:1-3)

By considering Jesus, we will not become wearied or faint in our minds. Christ did not faint; how can those who follow him?

The Apostles And Prophets Did Not Faint.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live

are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. (2 Cor. 4:7-16)

Hebrews 11 is dedicated to convincing Christians not to faint. The faithful of all the ages have been challenged by the world in which they lived. Their names are listed, the things they did for the Lord by faith is explained, and their faithful victory is held up as an example for the Christian to emulate. The saints are encouraged with the reality that "these all died in faith" (Heb. 11:13). The faithful go to heaven; they go because they endure and refuse to faint.

Areas Of Challenge For Christians

Our world has made it clear that it intends to make it more challenging for Christians to continue to live faithfully to God. We are challenged with immorality, religious error, worldliness, and materialism. Already the world is threatening, trying to silence any who will stand against their

perversions. If we live godly, we will suffer persecution, but we cannot faint. We must refuse to quit; we cannot accept the invitation of worldliness nor leave God for materialism. We cannot and must not give in or conform to the world. Fornication is wrong in the sight of the Lord; it always has been it always will be. Try as the world might, it cannot change genders nor redefine marriage. The faithful of all the ages have always dealt with immorality without, false doctrine within, and the need to remain faithful to God among wickedness.

How To Avoid Fainting

Diet And Exercise

It is imperative that Christians feed themselves healthy doctrine. The Word of the Lord is food and drink for our souls (John 4-6:63). Christ's words are spirit and they are life. We must not simply learn God's Word, but we must exercise it. Hebrews 5:12-14 teaches that we should grow to teach and that "strong meat belongs to those who have their senses exercised through use."

Proper Attire

It is a must that we dress for the conditions. If we are in water, there is gear for that as well as climbing a mountain or living in a desert. Water, heat, and snow ideally require different attire. The same is true for soldiers who could find themselves in any of these conditions. Spiritually, Christian soldiers are troubled by conditions we find ourselves in. Because of this, Inspiration exhorts us to take the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17). After the armor is on, the Bible exhorts us to stand and having done all, we can stand.

Arm Yourselves

Peter spent nearly his entire first book telling saints to submit in suffering. He told them a great many things, but

never did he tell them to faint because of suffering. Among the things he told them was the fact that Christ also suffered and if they follow him they should know the same thing will happen to them.

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. (1 Pet. 4:1-3)

Christians must know that we will suffer and it is far better to be prepared than surprised.

Conclusion

“Christianity is not for the faint of heart” is a warning to those who will come to Jesus and a reminder to those who have. We have no reason to faint; the world can actually do nothing to convince us to lose heart. Our faith is in God, not ourselves. God is the Creator of the universe, Christ died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit has revealed God’s Word. The truth has and will continue to set us free; therefore, we have nothing to fear.

God's faithful children will go to heaven, but only those who continue, persevere, and refuse to faint.

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Recruiting Soldiers: Effective Evangelism

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Several years ago, at the prompting of a dear friend and respected brother, I began assembling classes to train Christians in personal evangelism. These classes have been expanded into a five-part seminar, recorded by WVBS and taught in their entirety at Polishing the Pulpit. Brethren are thirsting for personal evangelism training. Paul told Timothy, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (KJV, 2 Tim. 2:2). This command is not only fulfilled in training men to preach, but also in

training congregations in soul winning. The following are the “nuts and bolts” of the seminar minus the numerous personal accounts of conversions.

Get Motivated

The Sacred Text declares, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Pro. 11:30). Apparently, wisdom is lacking in many places as congregations of our Lord are losing ground in America. In an article titled, “Church in America Marked by Decline,” Bobby Ross makes the following observations:

The number of men, women and children in the pews has dipped to the lowest level since a comprehensive effort to count members began in 1980, according to the 2009 edition of Churches of Christ in the United States. In the newly released directory, 21st Century Christian identifies 12,629 a cappella Churches of Christ with 1,578,281 adherents nation wide. Those figures represent 526 fewer churches and 78,436 fewer people in the pews than just six years ago.

In the 2015 edition, the numbers are as follows: 12,300 a cappella churches of Christ with 1,519,695 adherents nationwide (Royster 22). Regardless of how you view the faithfulness of the included congregations, we can all agree, things are not heading in the right direction.

Why are we losing the battle for souls in America? Over the years I have asked Christians why they are not involved in personal evangelism. Here are a few of the answers:

- Afraid, timid, shy, busy or tired
- Not being able to answer questions
- Ashamed of how I live my life, past mistakes
- Difficult time speaking to others
- Don't know how to start a conversation
- Not enough Bible knowledge, locating books in the Bible
- Can't think fast enough to answer questions
- Afraid to answer questions about verifying the Bible, creation, age of the earth
- Lack of love for the Lord
- Discouraged from past negative responses

The take-away from the above answers is clearly seen. We are doing a poor job training local Christians in soul winning. Recently, an instructor at a school of preaching in Texas called and requested this seminar at the congregation where he preaches. He said, "I can't remember a single soul winning workshop/seminar in our area in the past twenty years." Something is wrong when congregations are not spending time training Christians how to fulfill the Great Commission at home.

Just pause for a moment and evaluate our battle readiness. By a large number, our members are ill-equipped and untrained. How can we expect to defeat our fierce and ferocious foe in such a condition? The fact is that our armor, weapons, strategy, and Captain are perfect. There are no excuses acceptable for the current state of the Lord's church in America.

In addition, some have lost confidence in the Great Commission. They know it requires us to "Go ye therefore and teach" (Mat. 28:19), but they do not necessarily believe it works. Teaching people about evangelism and training them how to do it are not the same thing. I have found many

Christians just do not believe it works because they have not seen it from their Shepherds, preachers, or anyone else, for that matter. The thought seems to be, Why should I evangelize if they do not? Once members of a local congregation see it working, the effects will be multiplied.

Stay With The Message

In the not too distant past, faithful Christians prayed to the Father, but now some are “talking” to God. We used to have Bible classes on Wednesday evening and now some are having Bible “discussions.” At one time, we had Bible studies with the lost, but now some are having “conversations” about the Bible. Brethren, these changes are not the progress we need in the churches of Christ (2 John 9-11). I am convinced the biggest mistake we are making in personal evangelism is the lack of personal Bible study. Having a conversation about the Bible is not a Bible study. Conversational evangelism is an attempt to bring one to Christ based upon the power of personal persuasion. It relies upon our ability to connect, relate, and talk to reach the hearts of the lost. Those who have the “gift of gab” may excel while those who are more timid may not. It relies upon the art of communication instead of the power of the Word.

Let us further develop this topic by asking the following: How many Bible studies have you conducted in the past five years? Sadly, too many could not even name one. For those who answered in the affirmative, let us dig a little deeper. Was it a Bible study or a conversation about the Bible? Was it a tea room talk among friends? Perhaps you used social media and it turned into a Facebook frenzy. I am not trying to minimize your efforts or discourage good Bible discussions, but let us never confuse these with a personal Bible study. The goal of an evangelist is to get the Word into the heart of

the prospect and not to just have a friendly (or unfriendly) social encounter. Let me suggest three scriptural principles that help personal workers accomplish this goal.

Learn The Technique Of Deflection.

This is the art of avoiding a direct answer on little things in order to gain a study on the bigger things. When I have my first encounter with potential prospects, they normally ask many questions. I am very tempted to give an answer, but the Master Teacher has provided a different strategy. I go out of my way to avoid a direct answer. In fact, during one introductory session, the wife said to her husband, “I don’t think he wants to answer my questions.” Over years of experience, I have learned that unstructured questions and answers bear little fruit.

At times, Jesus redirected the thoughts of his audience by deflecting an answer. His deflection was designed to refocus their minds on the bigger picture.

And when he was come into the temple,
the chief priests and the elders of the
people came unto him as he was teaching,
and said, By what authority doest thou
these things? and who gave thee this
authority? And Jesus answered and said
unto them, I also will ask you one thing,
which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell
you by what authority I do these things.
(Mat. 21:23-24)

If you want to transition into a soul-saving study from a “conversation,” try learning from the example of Christ and **stop answering their questions!** Here are a few responses that might help you deflect:

- This is a great question. Would you like to see what the Bible says?
- I am glad you are thinking so deeply about this topic. Let's look at what Jesus said.
- It is so refreshing to find people who want to talk about the Bible. Have you ever seen what Paul said about it?

Notice that my answers were very generic and designed to point the conversation to something much better. It does not matter what you say or what you think. Steering the prospect towards the Bible is the most important thing you can do to win souls. The power is not in the person but in the Precepts! My past experiences have shown that having a “conversation” about baptism yielded almost no results in soul winning. In contrast, having a Bible study on baptism has yielded a harvest over 100 fold. The sooner we remove self from the equation, the better it will be for the lost soul.

Stop Saying And Start Showing.

The “saying mode” is where the teacher tells the prospect what the Bible says and/or what he believes. Telling others what to do is not an effective way to convict and convert. We need to learn the “showing mode.” This is where one opens a Bible and shows the prospect the answer. It takes conversion out of our personality and persuasive abilities and places it in the power of God. I know it is tempting to quote the verse, but do not do it. Let them see it for themselves. Let them read it with their own eyes. Remember, the eyes are the doors into the heart and a person will not change until the words dwell inside them.

When Jesus was approached by total strangers, He would immediately point them to the Word. Luke records, “And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying,

Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?” (Luke 10:26). Jesus knew that the power to change this lawyer’s heart rested in the inspired Word of God. Notice that He challenged this lawyer to read it. Sometimes we are tempted to quote the verse or read it ourselves to save time. However, allowing the prospect to turn his Bible to the passage and read it for himself has great value.

We must emphasize one more principle in this account. The lawyer was interested in winning the debate while Jesus was interested in winning the soul. “But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Until we understand this principle, our evangelism efforts will suffer. At times in my past, I was more zealous to win the argument. It was a score card of who made the most points and who left the winner. When our hearts are motivated by the cross, it will come out in how we treat the prospect. People are not numbers to tally, but souls who need our compassion.

Paul’s power was in the precious Precepts he preached and not in the style he spoke.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith

should not stand in the wisdom of men,
but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Furthermore he wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Remember: we do not want people converted to the teacher.

James said, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam. 1:21). The Word of God must be implanted into the heart of the prospect. It does no good if the seed is not placed within the soil.

Be Aware That The Message Divides.

Shortly after she became a Christian, a dear sister called and said, “I don’t know if I can take this anymore.” Family and friends were coming to her house and place of employment making emotional appeals for her return. She did not know what to say. I recommended that she ask them to have a Bible study. To her surprise, there was not one person who agreed to study. If we heed the lesson of Jesus in Luke 10, we will point them to the Scriptures. The Scripture divides those who want to study from those who want to argue. When we invite sincere friends and family to sit down and have a Bible study, they have two options.

First, they could accept your invitation. Jesus said, “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). I have found that most people do not fit into this category; Jesus affirmed, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Mat. 22:14). Keep in mind that the questions, concerns, and pleas from some are really

a reflection of their pride and/or guilt instead of a sincere desire for Truth.

Second, they could reject the Word of God. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). We do not determine who is worthy. The decision is left with the potential prospect. Even our Master teacher met those who turned away at His Word.

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:21-22)

Indeed, some will want to agitate and aggravate, and at times it is hard to tell who is being sincere. The use of the message takes the judgment away from you and places the responsibility on the potential prospect.

I am certainly not advocating we avoid friendly conversations. These social discussions help build relationships. It is the way we till the soil and prepare the ground, but we should not forget to plant the seed. Every Christian should know the power is in the teaching and not the teacher. We have the power to change this nation one soul at a time. It is found in the Gospel! Our goal should be a Bible study with as many people as possible. The Psalmist plainly penned, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:

the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Psa. 19:7).

Learn The Manner

The dilemma for many Christians is how to get into a Bible study. No magic formula, gimmick, or gadget will answer this question. It is a rare occurrence when you meet a complete stranger who agrees to study the Bible. I am certainly not dismissing these random meetings, but I am just stating the obvious. During the last 20 years, a majority of our Bible studies have budded from relationships that we have patiently cultivated over a period of weeks, months, and even years.

Shortly after the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), a rapid growth occurred that filled the whole world with the message of Christ. In Acts 2:41, there were 3,000 souls. In Acts 4:5, there were 5,000 men. In Acts 5, Luke records, “And believers were the more added to the LORD, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). What enabled such growth? The Bible says, “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the LORD added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). Many preachers focus on the word “added” and rightly so. Knowing that our denominational friends believe you can join a church, we constantly remind our audience that the Lord “adds” those being saved to His church. But perhaps we have overlooked another very important teaching. Luke also says the church enjoyed “favour with all the people.” According to Vine’s, the word means “grace on the part of the giver, kindness . . . acceptable” (“Accept”). In short, the Jerusalem community liked the Christians.

Most Bible studies occur because you have developed a relationship and secured the “favour” of the prospect. It

is the ultimate form of selflessness to love your neighbor as yourself. John Maxwell wrote, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” No one knew this better than our Lord. Luke says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Jesus is the Master Personal Evangelist. His ability to gain the favor of His fellow man was a key to his success.

In our world of fast food kitchens and drive-through windows, we rarely take time to secure the “favour” of others. Basic communication skills are being lost to texting and instant messaging. Our social groups have been reduced to Facebook and Twitter. Perhaps no society has ever had a greater thirst for “favour” than ours. God created man as a social being. The Bible states, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Many are longing to find that first century “favour” from churches today, but sadly, in too many places, it is just not there. Could it be that the lack of Bible studies by Christians today is linked to a lack of “favour?”

The following are some suggestions on how to display our “favour” to others. I must warn you up front that this will take both time and commitment on your part. Moreover, you will experience disappointments, hurt feelings, and downright discouragement, but the Lord promises the reward is worth it all!

We Must Use Our Homes.

Have we forgotten that our homes are a mission statement? It was once a common practice for Christians to invite visitors to their homes after the Sunday service for dinner. The Psalmist wrote, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psa. 127:1). Christ should be woven throughout its borders. The mat in front of

doors on too many homes of Christians reads “Come Back Later” instead of “Welcome.” Open homes equal open hearts. Our first-century brethren had open homes. They were eating together, praying together, and studying together. Notice the following passages:

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from **house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. (Acts 2:46; emphasis RW)

And daily in the temple, and in **every house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:42; emphasis RW)

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from **house to house**, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our LORD Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:20-21; emphasis RW)

If we continue to wait until the house is ready, it will never be used. Everyone wants the paint to be new, floors refinished, and furniture professionally cleaned. They seem fearful that someone may see a cobweb or dust-bunny. It is time we unlock our deadbolt and use our homes as a tool for soul winning. Fancy restaurants will never replace the impact your home can have upon the hearts of people. No one has Bible studies in a food booth.

We Need To Learn Hospitality.

I am afraid that this Christian attribute is almost lost in modern America. Hospitality is defined as “love of strangers” (Vine, “Hospitality”). The Greek word is used in Hebrews 13:2, “Be not forgetful to **entertain strangers**: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (emphasis RW). Sadly, most people have forgotten strangers. This passage seems to get lost as students focus on the angels instead of the central teaching of hospitality. All Christians are commanded to display hospitality, and elders are to be proven in this qualification (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Our hospitality to others should never be the reason behind their Gospel obedience, but the lack thereof could be the reason they do not. Jesus said, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). We commend Martha for opening her home, but we part with her in how she treated her guest. Sometimes people are more concerned about serving than the Servant. Hospitality means to pay attention to the prospects and to demonstrate your love by how you treat them. We should make them feel as the most important people in our homes.

We Must Learn How To Harken.

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who came down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” The guests responded with phrases like, “Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, Sir!” It was not until the end of the line, while greeting the

ambassador from Bolivia that his words were actually heard. Not quite knowing what to say, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, “I’m sure she had it coming.”

We are born with the ability to hear, but listening is a learned skill. James said, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jam. 1:19). God gave us two ears and one mouth. This means He wants me to listen twice as much as He wants me to speak. After one of the personal evangelism seminars, a lady gave me this note: “A wise old owl lived in a tree. The more he talked, the less he heard. The less he talked, the more he heard. Why can’t we be like that old bird?”

We should spend a lot of time asking about the prospect. Questions should center around family, hobbies, past experiences, and things they enjoy. This is a time to find common ground and to develop friendship and trust. As you listen, take mental notes of things that may need emphasized during a study. Have they been divorced? Do they have any organized religious background? Do they have family who are devout in any particular religion? Does their speech reveal a belief in Calvinism, Premillennialism, Pentecostalism, or any other false doctrine?

Do Not Forget To Hesitate.

It is very **important** as you listen to hesitate and deflect. This is not the time to refute, reprove, or rebuke regardless of what is said. Now is not the time to instruct and teach. Remember, you are building a relationship and waiting for an opportunity to transition into a Bible study. As the relationship with the prospect grows, conversations will naturally become more serious. Perhaps they will even discuss some very personal situations. As you hearken and hesitate, be ready to transition into the Bible study. Anytime a family comes into our home, we have the Bible study materials ready. We do not

always know when or if we will have a study. The following are some examples of how to apply these principles.

My son is really struggling with his marriage. I don't know how to help him. What do you think?

I am so sorry to hear this news. Marriage is so important. I know God loves this family. Would you mind coming over to the kitchen table as I have something I need to show you that will help marriage?

Our nation is changing. It scares me to think about where we might be going. What do you think?

We, too, share your concerns. We have something you have got to see. Let me show you this really good Bible lesson over on the kitchen table.

A friend told me that you guys don't believe in mechanical instruments of music. Is this true?

This is a great question. I am so glad you asked. Can I show you something that will help answer this question?

In short, we need to put "personal" back into personal Bible studies. If every Christian opened his home, extended hospitality, hearkened to the prospect, and hesitated to give their opinions, we would have more Bible studies than we could ever hope to conduct. Luke recorded, "And daily in the temple, and in **every house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42; emphasis RW).

Do Not Argue About The Method

Over the years great and wonderful tools have been written to help conduct Bible studies (*The Jule Miller Film Strips, John Hurt Series, Back to the Bible, Fishers of Men,*

Evangelism Made Simple, The Open Bible Study, Circles of Truth, etc.) I am not in the business of trying to sell or advance one sound method over another. Each method is like a lighthouse on the shore trying to beam brightly in hopes of steering lost souls to the peaceful shores. The most important question is, do you have a method? If you have a sound method for personal Bible study, please use it. If you do not, it is past time you learn one. We have already established the point that a structured Bible study is much preferred to conversational evangelism. Therefore, let us consider *Back to the Bible* by Bobby Bates. *Why Back to the Bible?* We first learned of this method from Brother Rudy Cain, our teacher at the Southwest School of Bible studies, in Austin, Texas, and director of World Video Bible School in Maxwell, Texas. We have had well over 150 studies using these booklets. Let me give you three reasons why we recommend this method.

First, It Is Simple.

I personally know of new converts who used this method to teach family members just days after their own conversion. If they can do it, surely those who have been Christians for 5, 10, and 20 years can do it, too!

It comes in small easy-to-carry booklets. It is filled with basic yes and no questions and fill-in-the-blank sentences. It requires just three, 90-minute sessions. It does not overload the prospect with too much information, realizing the Great Commission orders us to teach, baptize, and teach again (Mat. 28:19-20). A person does not need to know everything to become a Christian. I have witnessed young teens use it. It has been used by Christians in their 90s.

Second, It Is Scriptural.

It is based upon the New King James Version. The purpose of *Back to the Bible* is to get the Word in man's hearts

for it is the converting power of God (Psa. 19:7). It requires the prospect to read a Bible verse(s) for each question. There is great value in allowing the prospect to turn the pages of his own Bible and to read and see the Truth for himself. Its scriptural division is as follows: Book one is on Bible authority. It focuses on the map of revelation (how God's Word came to man) and covers the differences between the Old and New Testament. Book two is on the church. It focuses on her organization, worship, and name. Book three is on sin and salvation. It also has a very short lesson on discipleship.

Third, It Is Successful.

The following information is not given for any personal accolades. People want to know what works, and we can vouch for *Back to the Bible*. Over the past 20 years, we have had an over 95% conversion rate. In fact, in the past nine years, we have had only one family complete the lessons and not obey the Gospel. When you combine the principles of focusing on the Message, approaching the prospect in a loving Manner, and using an organized Method, you have a sound and successful strategy for soul saving!

Conclusion

We never hit targets for which we do not aim. If we do not aim for a Bible study, we will never have one. Perhaps the reason you are not studying with the lost is because you are not aiming for them. If you have not been involved in soul saving, why not start today? Personal evangelism takes love for souls, patience, time, trust in God and His Word, and prayer. It is possible to turn the tide of shrinking membership in churches of Christ by evangelizing one soul at a time. It has been done in the past and it can be done today. You do not have to be a preacher, elder, or deacon to do it. Brethren, it is never too late to learn.

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Wounded Warriors: Help For Struggling Christians

Jack Honeycutt



Jack Honeycutt is married to Becky, and together they have two grown children, Heather and Heath, and seven grandchildren. Jack graduated from the Nashville School of Preaching in 1987 and earned his Bachelor of Ministry from Theological University of America in 1999. He was also selected in 1987 for the “Outstanding Young Men of America” award.

Jack has been preaching the gospel since 1984. He is presently the full-time coordinator for the Andhra Pradesh, India Mission Work, overseen by the Willette Church of Christ in Macon County, Tennessee. Jack leads mission teams into India to conduct evangelistic campaigns and to conduct lectureships for the native preachers.

Jack conducts 12 to 15 gospel meetings each year. He is a frequent speaker at Polishing the Pulpit. He has also participated in two debates with a Baptist preacher.

We are all keenly aware of the fact that Christians struggle to remain faithful. We often work diligently with those whom we have taught the gospel. We are thrilled when they open their hearts to the truth of the Word. They see their need to be in a right relationship with God. They obey the final act of baptism that puts them into Christ. Fellow Christians surround them with hugs, handshakes, and well wishes. Now a new family will be working with our congregation . . . or so we thought.

The new family attends faithfully for a few weeks or months, and gradually we are seeing less and less of them, until one day we come to the realization that they have completely stopped attending.

Also, those who have been Christians for a number of years sometimes get in a rut. They become lukewarm, their attendance becomes lax, and they fail to be involved in the works of the church. We once could depend on them, but where have they gone?

We are alarmed! What happened?! How can they do this?! What is wrong with them?!

Why do we see this scenario play out so often in the church?

Various Reasons Why Christians Become Weak

1. No encouragement, lack of friendships among brethren
2. Not enough Bible study/teaching
3. Worldly gain—too busy with job/career and activities of life
4. Worldliness—living like those of the world
5. Struggling with prior addictions—drugs and/or alcohol
6. Marriage problems and/or family problems
7. Environment

Addressing Each Of These Reasons

No Encouragement

We have often heard the phrase *leaving folks at the baptistery steps*. Sadly, this is true in too many situations. Put yourself in the place of a new convert. You receive initial love and encouragement following your baptism, but the next time you return to services, you may get a few nods and

several ask, “How are you doing?” This continues for several weeks. You try to be patient and think that in time you will develop relationships with the brethren. But weeks go by and nothing really changes. Sometimes you feel alone even in a crowd (among brethren).

You may ask yourself, doesn’t anyone care enough about me to be more personable? Doesn’t anyone want to have a meaningful relationship with me?

I guarantee this scenario is somewhat accurate. Finally, folks are not feeling the “belonging.” They are not feeling any real love. They leave, disillusioned about what Christianity is to be about.

Hebrews 10:24 instructs us, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works” (KJV). The word for *provoke* means “a stimulation, or an incitement (to do good)(Vine, “Paroxusmos”). The word *consider* means “to perceive, observe, to fix one’s eyes or mind upon (Vine, “Katanoeo”). We must make a concentrated effort to “fix our eyes and our minds” upon those who need encouragement.

The same word for “consider” is used in James 1:23, “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man **beholding** his natural face in a glass.” When one “beholds” himself, he is observing and fixing his eyes upon his image. When we observe/behold ourselves, we should see any changes that need to be made and do what is necessary to make things right. When we observe/behold those who need encouragement, we must put forth action that will lift them up. It does no good to see a need, go away, and then forget what needs to be done (Jam. 1:24).

A true scenario: My niece’s husband was incarcerated for breaking a restraining order, as well as some drug charges. We got in touch with a Christian man who lived in the area. He volunteered to study with my niece’s husband, Scott.

After several studies, Scott obeyed the gospel. Kevin, the fine man who had studied with him, continued studies with Scott every week. He let Scott know that, even though he was in jail, that he was free in Christ. He also shared with him from the Bible the way God intended for marriage to be. Scott admitted he had not been a good husband or a good father.

Scott was incarcerated for several more months, which was a positive thing. During that time, he was able to study his Bible often and grow.

After being released from jail, Kevin stayed in touch with Scott. He took him and his children out for meals. He also introduced them to other Christians. He has continued to be a mentor and an encourager. Scott is faithful in his attendance and is amazed by the outpouring of love he is being shown.

He has now reunited with his wife, who is also a Christian. They study and pray together. He has been such an asset in helping with the care of the children. They even cook together. Other members of the congregation where they attend continue to befriend and encourage them.

Brethren, this is so necessary! Unless Christians take the time and make the effort to build up and encourage these folks, many will fall by the wayside.

Not Enough Bible Study/Teaching

Anyone who is not in the Word enough is in danger of becoming weak and falling away. Particularly, if new converts are not helped along in their studies, they often become weak and fall away.

Every congregation, whether large or small, should have a method of ongoing teaching for new converts. There are many good books that help tremendously. Two of my favorites are *Why I Am A Member Of The Church Of Christ* by Leroy Brownlow, and *Muscle And A Shovel* by Michael

Shank. But we must not stop here. The new convert also has a dire need for one-on-one studies. A lack of grounding these folks in the faith is one huge reason the church is losing so many members! A lack of grounding also leads to liberalism.

There is no such instant maturity available on this earth. God does not offer a formula that produces fully mature Christians overnight. Christian growth comes through hard-core, gutsy perseverance of applying what you hear, and obeying it and thereby learning how to handle those inevitable problems. (Swindoll)

A survey of self-pronounced American Christians has shown some alarming statistics concerning Bible knowledge:

1. 48% could not name the four gospels.
2. 52% cannot identify more than two or three of Jesus' disciples.
3. 60% can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.
4. 71% think, "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse

"Americans revere the Bible, but by and large they don't know what it says, and because they don't, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates" (Barna).

Another area that helps to develop strong, knowledgeable Christians is biblical and challenging preaching. Too often in our day and time we hear short sermonettes, story-telling, and jokes. It is OK to add a little humor, but we cannot let that humor override sound Bible doctrine. Paul instructs Timothy that his preaching must convince, rebuke, exhort, and teach (2 Tim. 4:2). Let us look at each of these:

Convince

This word means “to overcome the doubts of; persuade by argument or evidence; make feel sure” (Webster, “Convince”). Of what do we need to persuade people? That we are all sinners and Christ came to redeem our souls (Rom. 5:8). We must show them Bible evidence that what God says is true. We must let them know that God has given us (in His Word) everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). We are only able to help them to “feel sure” by showing book, chapter, and verse.

Rebuke

This word means “to blame or scold in a sharp way; reprimand” (Webster, “Rebuke”). As much as we all try to do our best in living the Christian life, we will all fall short. We must have constant reminders about how to live. Some may not realize when they have sin in their lives. Young converts, and even some who have been in the church for a long period of time, fail to see that some of their practices are sinful. Thus, preachers have an ongoing task in pointing sin out.

Exhort

This word means “to urge earnestly by advice, warning, etc. to do what is proper or required; admonish strongly” (Webster, “Exhort”). Notice that this word entails the urgency to others to do what is “proper or required.” Because obeying God’s Word is urgent and the only way our souls can be saved, preachers cannot herald a watered-down, better felt-than-told gospel. Seeing that the word *exhort* also means to “admonish strongly,” preachers must put conviction and power in their presentation of the Word. We usually have no trouble in having enthusiasm about things we are passionate about. What can preachers be more passionate about than the soul-saving Word?!

Teach

This word means “to provide a person with knowledge, or insight (Webster, “Teach”). How can a preacher be sure to provide this to a congregation? He must assess the members of the congregation. He must know the congregation with their particular strengths or weaknesses. He must consider new converts and weaker members as well as well-grounded, knowledgeable members. He must strive to be balanced and provide spiritual food for all.

Recently a gospel preacher discussed from the pulpit such subjects as politics, good principles for life, and the question Why can't we all just get along? with a minute amount of Scripture that did not even seem to tie in with what he was saying. Folks went away from that service without having gained any real knowledge of the Word.

What About Bible Classes?

Elders need to keep a close eye on who is teaching Bible classes as well as what is being taught. Too often, teachers are unprepared, there is no set curriculum, and even those who are unfaithful are allowed to teach these classes. A statement was once made, “Maybe she will be more faithful if we sign her up to teach a Bible class.” Please note: Faithfulness comes **before** teaching, not vice versa!

My wife and I visit many congregations in doing the India work. At times, we have had some of our grandchildren with us. There was one instance when my wife took the grandchildren to class and actually had to teach the class herself because the teacher was unprepared. In another instance when she took the grandchildren to class, the children (toddlers) were read a very short paper of a Bible story and then were allowed to play the majority of the class time.

Elders, please know what is going on in the classroom!

Worldly Gain/Too Busy With Job/Career And Activities Of Life

It is only natural that everyone is trying to survive in this world. We must have the necessities of life. But it is disturbing when one goes way beyond this and overworks to the neglect of doing what is necessary to maintain his spiritual well-being. Many are more concerned with keeping up with the lifestyles of their neighbors. Their minds are consumed with the pride of life. They want to portray to the world that they are successful.

The Proverbs writer brings a sobering thought to us, “Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven” (Pro. 23:4-5).

The rich man in Luke 12:13-21 certainly could have benefited from this advice. Seemingly, he took no thought of spiritual things. His ground had yielded plentifully. In fact, he had so much in storage that he had no more room. But that was no problem; he would just tear down his barns and build bigger barns. He would, then, store all his crops and goods in these bigger barns. He knew these goods would suffice for his physical well-being for many years, so he would just take it easy for a while.

Did he ever wonder how he could help others with his good fortune? Did it cross his mind that there was much more to life than having earthly possessions? Apparently not! In verse 20 God calls him a “fool” and tells him, “This night your soul will be required of you” (Luke 12:20).

By making this statement, Jesus is reminding this rich man, You have an eternal soul that you are not even thinking about. What good are riches if your soul is going to be suffering in torment forever and ever?!

How many, even in the church today, are guilty of the same thing? We, too, can be fools when we lay up treasures for ourselves and are not rich toward God (Luke 12:21).

Being busy in trying to make a living is not the only reason Christians become weak. They also allow the busyness of life to push those things conducive to godliness to the bottom of their priority list.

How many times have we seen more visitors at our gospel meetings than our own members? How often do we see Christians disregard worship by going to their children's ballgames or other sporting events? What about personal prayer and study time? It is most likely lacking as well.

People often lament the fact that they are just too busy to do this or that concerning the work of the church. But how much time do they spend on Facebook/Twitter, the Internet, or the phone? How much time is spent in recreation?

The title of this lesson includes the phrase *wounded warriors*. Sometimes we are guilty of wounding or hurting ourselves. We cannot always blame others for our "handicaps" or "defects," spiritually speaking.

We must encourage all members to prioritize their time. We may need to help them evaluate time spent in their job/career and other activities versus time spent in the spiritual.

Worldliness

In 2 Timothy 4:10, we read of Demas, who had forsaken Paul "having loved the present world." The word *forsaken* means "to abandon, to leave behind." Apparently, Demas was more interested in things of the world than he was in helping Paul or continuing his efforts in spiritual things.

This is where many Christians today struggle.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love

of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

James 4:4 reveals that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Some Christians have great difficulty in **not** being friends with the world. My physical brother, who is denominational, attended a convention with several members of the Lord's church. He said these men were using profanity and flirting with women. One, who was an elder in the church, was drinking alcohol and also engaging in ungodly behavior.

These Christians need to be reminded that they have been raised with Christ and are to set their affections on things above (Col. 3:1-2). In some of these instances, church discipline needs to be practiced. If leaders of the church can get by with such behavior, what would keep the members from following their example?

I realize that the title of this lesson is “Help For Struggling Christians,” and the suggestion to practice church discipline may seem, at first glance, an improper way to handle unfaithful members. But is that not what the inspired Word suggests?

A few years ago at Willette, our elders stood before the congregation and repented for not having practiced church discipline. They let the congregation know that from that day forward church discipline would be practiced. Since that day attendance has been at an all-time high, and this has helped the brethren to realize just what a serious thing Christianity is.

Church discipline is, ultimately, for the saving of souls (1 Cor. 5:5). Other scriptures also concern church discipline: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; 1 Corinthians 5:11.

This can also go back to a point we made earlier—not enough friendships among brethren. If one is struggling with worldliness, he needs to be careful about putting himself in situations where he is tempted, obviously among worldly people. One must determine to surround himself with the godly and spiritually-minded brethren in order to overcome worldliness.

Struggling With Addictions

It is no secret that our world as a whole has become drug dependent. Illegal drugs are running rampant, but prescription drugs are captivating so many who never intended to “get hooked.”

When we are practicing the Great Commission, we often come into contact with these who are struggling with this problem. So many in these situations are looking for something better. They feel as if they are in a rut and they have no way of ever getting out.

These people, who are willing to open their heart to the truth of the Word, may feel they have a glimmer of hope for the first time in their lives. But their addictions will always be there nudging them to turn back to the path of least resistance.

We, as well-grounded, faithful Christians must stay close to these folks. We must be their mentors. We do this by being there for them, praying with them, and reminding them of all the wonderful promises in the Word.

We must be ready to “hold up their hands.” Aaron and Hur literally held up the hands of Moses as the Israelites were fighting with Amalek. As long as Moses’ hands were held up

the Israelites prevailed, but if he let his hands down, Amalek prevailed. Moses became weary of holding up his hands. Aaron and Hur saw this, got on each side of Moses, and held his hands up. Thus, Amalek was defeated (Exo. 17:11-13).

Many years ago, when I was the minister of the North Avenue Church of Christ in Atlanta, Georgia a rough looking man came into the door of the church building on a Sunday morning as I was greeting everyone. He asked me if he was welcome there, and I told him, “Of course!” I found out later that he had just been released from prison about a month before. He had been into drugs and alcohol and had been knifed.

He had once been a faithful member of the church. This man, Mr. Tim Couch, asked for the prayers of the church that day. He and I spent a lot of time together and became good friends. He told me that he prayed that God would do to him, whatever it took, to keep him faithful. At times, when he was struggling with his alcohol cravings, he would call me and ask me to pray with him.

Tim was active in the work and service of the church. He was fervent in striving to win souls to Christ. Tim died a few years later as a faithful Christian. He is a true, living example that addiction can be overcome with the help of Christ and supportive brethren.

Can those struggling with addiction depend on us?

An 1865 letter from William Sherman to U. S. Grant serves as a good reminder for us. It said: “I knew wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place you would come—if alive” (Auto Illustrator).

Are we, in the church, **alive** in helping struggling Christians, specifically those who are trying to overcome addictions? Or do we “wash our hands” in dealing with “such trash?”

Marriage/Family Problems

When people are struggling in their marriage, it is often very difficult for them to see the need for spirituality. Maybe they are bogged down by hurt and unfaithfulness of a spouse. They feel like they are drowning with no hope of survival. Their focus is mainly just trying to get through each day of their tumultuous situation. They may wonder, God, why did this have to happen to me?

Family problems, whether marital or problems with our children or other relatives, end up with the same result. These negatives overpower the spiritual and Satan takes precedence. Then the Word is neglected, prayers seem unanswered, attendance to worship begins to wane, and soon people find themselves unfaithful.

The church can be truly effective in helping to prevent family problems, as well as to resolve family problems by providing the following:

1. Classes geared toward responsibilities in the home
2. Workshops, retreats, lectures and seminars for entire families
3. Counseling/Marriage Retreats/Polishing the Pulpit

Families need to know that they also have a responsibility. They must put forth proper action in order for family problems to be solved. The church cannot do everything for them. Let us examine the Scriptures to find help for the family unit.

As we scrutinize the text found in Ephesians 5:22-28, we find the stipulations of behavior in both husband and wife. Verses 22-24 remind wives to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord. Just as Christian wives are willing to humble themselves and be obedient to the will of Christ, they should also be obedient to their husbands. This is not a popular thing to do in today's society. A few years ago, a

couple had asked me to perform their marriage ceremony. As we were going over the vows, the phrase *I promise to honor and obey my husband* came up. The wife said she was not going to say she would obey her husband. I tried to explain to her the way God intended for the marriage relationship to work, that this did not make her inferior. But she was still adamant about not saying she would obey her husband. I told her she was not ready for marriage and that she would need to find someone else to perform her ceremony, which she did.

Wives need to understand, that in order for the family unit to run smoothly, someone has to be the head of the house. It is this way in every aspect of life. Someone has to be the leader and make final decisions.

Ephesians 5:25-28 instruct husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and as their own bodies. Is this not a tremendous amount of love that husbands are to bestow upon their wives?! Christ's love for the church was a sacrificial love. The husband's love for the wife should be the same. Also, when husbands love their wives as their own bodies, is that not a phenomenal amount of love?! How can a marriage go wrong when all of these factors are present in a marriage? The answer: It should not go wrong!

What about the children in this equation? Inspiration has instructions for them as well. Ephesians 6:1-3 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

The phrase "in the Lord" denotes the fact that the apostle Paul was specifically telling children to obey their parents only in things that were right and proper in the sight of God.

How will children live long on the earth by honoring and obeying their parents? Most Christian parents are going to set forth instructions designed to nurture, protect, and ensure their children's well-being. When these instructions are obeyed, children have a better chance of living long on the earth. Of course, this is a general rule, not a concrete law, because anyone can die at any time.

Ephesians 6:4 addresses fathers in the training of their children. It reads, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (ASV). Fathers are likely addressed here because they are the spiritual leaders of the home. Notice that children are to be nurtured. This word denotes tenderness. Along with this tenderness, children are to be disciplined and instructed. When this method is used, provoking a child to wrath (as used in the first phrase of this verse) should not be an issue.

In Colossians 3:21, the phrase "Fathers, provoke not your children" is used again. Could this be because fathers sometimes tend to be too harsh with their children?

Fathers, as well as mothers, must show balance in the rearing of children. They must teach by word and example. They must always strive to be fair. They must encourage and praise children as often as possible.

Concerning the healing of modern society, James M. Gillis has said,

The family is the nucleus of all society. You can have no prosperous state unless the family is healthy. You can have no effective church unless the family is sound . . . The family is the organic cell from which all human societies are constructed. (Coffman 215)

Environment

One's surroundings definitely have an effect on him. So often, if one has been converted through a prison ministry, he has little choice but to go back to the environment from which he came. He usually does not have anywhere else to stay. Thus, he is right back in the middle of the influences that got him in trouble in the first place.

Is there anything the church can do about this? They can try to help this person find a job and housing. They can be there to lift up and encourage. They can be friends and mentors. This may need to be an ongoing process. Christians must **show an interest** in the lives of these folks!

Oftentimes we are hesitant to get involved with those who have had troubles, especially those who have had problems with the law. We just do not want to be a part of anything that makes us feel uncomfortable. But God has called us to live a sacrificial life (Rom. 12:1).

If we feel we "are above" these people, we certainly do not have the love that Christ so often speaks about. We may not realize it, but sometimes our love only includes a certain "circle" of Christians, we deem to be similar to ourselves. We think, Well, I don't have anything in common with so and so; I'll let someone else be an encourager to them. First John 4:8 says, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." John does not say this love is exclusive to certain ones.

When and where possible, we must create an environment that permeates an atmosphere of acceptance, comfort, and love.

It is no wonder that James wrote in chapter 2,

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our
Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with

partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” (Jam. 2:1-4)

James continued, “Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him (Jam. 2:5). Also, in verse 9 we read, “But if you show partiality, you commit sin” (Jam. 2:9). Whether we want to admit it or not, we are all sometimes guilty of showing partiality.

Someone recently said, “I hate to say this, but too many people in the church are snooty.” Brethren, when we are guilty of this, we are certainly not creating an environment conducive to maintaining the faith of struggling Christians.

Conclusion

When I consider the title of this lesson, “Wounded Warriors: Help For Struggling Christians,” I cannot help but think of the “Wounded Warrior Project” that we often hear advertised on TV. Of course, this program is designed to provide funds for those who have been physically injured in time of war. Maybe they have lost various limbs of their bodies. Maybe they are suffering from Post Traumatic Brain Disorder, which is a condition that has affected the mind due to the horrors and tragedies of war.

Our hearts go out to those who have sacrificed so much for our freedoms, but we find it difficult to see the state of those who are maimed for life. We would rather not even **look** at the condition of their physical bodies.

Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice for us. And we would rather not **look/see** what His battered body looked like. We cringe when we see pictures depicting His beatings and His excruciating death on the cross. But we know without that bloody, heart-wrenching sacrifice we could not enjoy spiritual freedom.

Those of us who have been washed in Christ's blood and have been added to His church (Acts 20:28; Acts 2:47) should be striving to be true warriors. But, as hard as we try, we may find ourselves at times in the "wounded unit." We often also find others in this same unit. They may have suffered shipwreck concerning the faith, as did Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1:19-20.

May we wage the good warfare, having faith, and by having a good conscience, knowing we have helped to save the wounded (1 Tim. 1:18-19).

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Great Battles

The Walls Of Jericho

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By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (KJV, Heb. 11:30). The walls fell not by force, fighting, fear, foot-pounding, nor frequency, but by faith. Faith was the secret weapon that toppled Jericho’s mighty defenses, Israel’s first victory in the Promised Land.

Israel’s wait was almost over. Their family had spent 430 years waiting from the giving of God’s promise to Abraham until the giving of God’s law to the people at Sinai (Gal. 3:17). They had spent forty years wandering in the wilderness learning to trust God (Num. 14:11; Num. 14:33-34). They had spent thirty days weeping over the death of their trusted leader who led them out of Egypt (Deu. 34:8). They had spent a day walking across Jordan’s dry riverbed, a miracle intended to show that God was with their new leader Joshua just as He had been with Moses (Jos. 3:7-8; Jos. 3:15-16;

Jos. 4:14). They had spent four days healing after circumcising an entire generation that was not yet sanctified unto God (Jos. 5:9; Jos. 5:5-8). Now encamped at Gilgal were 601,730 fighting men and their families, and with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (the only two soldiers remaining from the initial military census taken at Sinai), their combat experience tallied to three engagements: the defeat of Sihon at the battle of Jahaz (Num. 21:23-25), the defeat of Og at the battle of Edrei (Num. 21:33-35), and the defeat of Midian in the Midianitish war (Num. 31:2-8). Westward across the lush Jordan River Valley stood the hill country and the heart of the land God had promised to Abraham. God had led them to a point of insurgency affording the opportunity to take the central hill country and thereby divide the land's inhabitants in half, severing settlements to the North from those to the South, an invaluable strategic advantage. However, between them and that strategic hill country laid a challenge: the city of Jericho, "the only city in the southern Jordan Valley" and "the gateway to the Hill Country further west" (Hoerth 205).

Jericho was distinct among ancient cities. It is considered to be the world's oldest and lowest city, with an elevation of 670 feet below sea level ("Did the Israelites"). Archaeologists have found there "simple mud-brick housing dating centuries before such bricks were used in Mesopotamia" (Hoerth 83). "Some historians say Jericho may have been the first walled village early man ever constructed" (Hackworth 38). This would make Jericho the site of "the earliest defense system known in the world" (Hoerth 83). Its defenses were not only superlative chronologically, but also in efficacy, often regarded as the "strongest town of Canaan" (Keil and Delitzsch).

The mound, or "tell" of Jericho was surrounded by a great earthen rampart,

or embankment, with a stone retaining wall at its base. The retaining wall was some four to five meters (12–15 feet) high. On top of that was a mudbrick wall two meters (six feet) thick and about six to eight meters (20–26 feet) high. At the crest of the embankment was a similar mudbrick wall whose base was roughly 14 meters (46 feet) above the ground level outside the retaining wall. . . . This is what loomed high above the Israelites as they marched around the city each day for seven days. (“The Walls”)

Keil and Delitzsch observed, “[Jericho’s] walls would appear impregnable to a people that had grown up in the desert and was so utterly without experience in the art of besieging or storming fortified places.” Yet the wall itself was not the only obstacle. Ancient urban population densities averaged between one hundred and two hundred people per acre (Hoerth 207). Jericho’s upper wall enclosed approximately six acres, and the lower exterior wall added at least three more acres (“The Walls”). Therefore, the city’s resident population would have neared 2000 in number. This number would swell with Canaanites from surrounding villages fleeing to Jericho for refuge within its walls as Israel neared, thus “there were several thousand people inside the walls when the Israelites came against the city” (“The Walls”). These thousands of densely packed Canaanites would be well armed. The city’s arsenal would have included not only the close-combat weaponry such as swords, shields, helmets, and recently introduced chain mail, but also rocks, slings, and bows, the projectile weapons that posed the greatest

threat to invasion forces attempting to scale or breach the walls (Hoerth 208).

In addition to its walls and weapons, Jericho had water. “A copious spring which provided water for ancient, as well as modern, Jericho lay inside the city walls” (“The Walls”). It was also harvest time, and many crops had already been gathered as evidenced by stalks of flax on Rahab’s roof (Jos. 2:6). Well watered and well supplied, Jericho was ready for a long siege. “A heavily fortified city with an abundant water supply would normally take many months, even years, to subdue” (“The Walls”).

Israel could not afford to waste months or years besieging one city of a few thousand inhabitants. Such a siege of Jericho would allow Canaanite reinforcements time to assemble from the hills, putting Israel on the defensive and forfeiting their advance toward the central hill country. Any endeavor to gain quick victory by scaling or breaching the wall with brute strength, though within the realm of slim possibility considering the vastness of Israel’s forces, would result in significant loss of life. Such a demoralizing start to their insurgency would not bode well for God’s newly appointed leader of this historically fickle bunch of murmurers.

Militarily speaking, Jericho posed a formidable tactical challenge to Israel. “The location of the city was strategic in that it stood squarely in the way of Israel’s advance” (Hackworth 38). “Any military force attempting to penetrate the central hill country from the east would, by necessity, first have to capture Jericho” (“Did the Israelites”). Jericho could not be bypassed, for that would constitute a threat to Israel’s flank as they moved westward (Hoerth 205) and would ignore God’s order to drive out Canaan’s idolatrous residents.

So how could Israel dispose of the fortress city of Jericho and advance further toward the central hill country without

sacrificing valuable time, lives, and morale? In short, if relying solely upon human ingenuity and military prowess, they could not. Jericho was designed to inflict either delay or death on an invading army: taking Jericho required a sacrifice of time, lives, or both. Fortunately for Israel, they were not dependent upon human ingenuity or military prowess. Jericho’s walls would fall in only seven days—by faith (Heb. 11:30).

How did Jericho’s walls fall by faith? Consider the account as recorded in Joshua 6.

God Supplied The Instructions.

When the Lord appeared to Joshua, His use of the past tense showed that victory of Jericho was assured: “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho” (Jos. 6:2). God promised victory, but this did not mean Joshua and Israel could kick back and relax while sipping sweet tea and watching Jericho’s walls tumble from afar; no, the men of war would need to march in a procession that included seven priests with trumpets of “rams’ horns” and the ark of the Lord, circling Jericho once a day for six days. Then on the seventh day, they would compass the city seven times; on the seventh lap, the priests would blow the trumpets, the people would shout, the walls would fall, and Israel’s fighting men would be able to go straight up into the fortress city (Jos. 6:3-5). God supplied these instructions. God directed it.

Joshua Applied The Instructions.

Joshua applied God’s **explicit** instructions when he conveyed God’s message concerning the ark of the covenant, the seven priests with trumpets, and the men of war (Jos. 6:6). Joshua applied God’s **existing** instructions for “the armed men” to go before the priests and the ark (Jos. 6:9): these “armed men” were troops from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh who had vowed to go before

the Lord and their brethren in the conquest of Canaan in exchange for land east of the Jordan River (Jos. 1:13-15; Jos. 4:12-13). Joshua applied God's **implicit** instructions when he commanded the people not to shout, speak, or make any vocal noise until the day he commanded. Joshua understood that God's specific command for the people to shout at the trumpet sound on the seventh day ruled out any shouting while marching around Jericho prior to that (Jos. 6:10). God directed it. Joshua declared it.

Israel Complied With The Instructions.

Israel complied with the **explicit** instructions: the priests bore the ark and blew the seven trumpets as instructed (Jos. 6:8). Israel complied with the **existing** instruction concerning the already-specified armed men leading the way and the remainder ("rereward" in the KJV, "rearward" in the ASV, and "rear guard" in the ESV) following after the ark (Jos. 6:9). Israel complied with God's **implicit** instructions (made explicit by Joshua) by abstaining from vocal communication until Joshua gave the command to shout (Jos. 6:11; Jos. 6:13-16; Jos. 6:20). God directed it. Joshua declared it. Israel did it.

God **supplied** the instructions. Joshua **applied** God's instructions. Israel **complied** with the instructions. The result: "So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat" (Jos. 6:20).

Why did the walls fall? Was it because of what God directed, what Joshua declared, or what the people did? The answer is, Yes. It was all three, for Jericho's walls fell by faith.

Hebrews 11 lists the fall of Jericho's walls as one of Scripture's greatest exhibitions of faith. A study of Jericho's fallen walls shows what faith does.

Faith Thinks

Faith Thinks About What The Evidence Proves.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The world today sees “faith” as leaping blindly into the dark, stepping onto an untested limb, or hoping without reason, but the Hebrews writer emphasized that faith involves evidence. As Paul wrote, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Faith is based on evidence, and God’s Word is evidence. Faith has no fear of reason. Faith faces facts and arrives at logical conclusions. Faith looks at the evidence for God’s existence and arrives at the conclusion that God is there. Faith looks at the evidence for Scripture’s validity and arrives at the conclusion that God is its source.

Faith Thinks About Where The Evidence Points.

Faith is based on evidence, but it also supplies evidence. By faith the people of old (“elders” in the KJV) “obtained a good report” (Heb. 11:2). The Greek word rendered “obtained a good report” is *martureo*, the verb form of *martus*, a witness (Strong, “Martureo”). A witness is one whose testimony serves as evidence. Hebrews 11 has been described as “Faith’s Hall of Fame” or “The Hall of Faith,” and every example of faith given is evidence of what faith can accomplish: all of them “obtained a good report [*martureo*] through faith” (Heb. 11:39). Thus the Hebrews writer says Christians are compassed about with “so great a cloud of witnesses [*martus*]” (Heb. 12:1) not because those gone before are watching to be witnesses **of** what the saints in this world will do, but because the testimony they left behind gives unequivocal witness **to** saints in this world about what they can do through faith! Faith stands on evidence and supplies further evidence. This is the very context that declares, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30).

Joshua already knew the reality of God and the veracity of His Words. He had heard God thunder from Sinai, and he had even accompanied Moses when God called the lawgiver up into the mountain (Exo. 24:12-13). As a soldier of Israel, as a servant to Moses, and as a spy in Canaan, Joshua had exhibited his faith in God. It could be rightly assumed that Joshua needed no more evidence to believe anything God might say. Nevertheless, when God spoke with Joshua after crossing the Jordan River, He said, "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho" (Jos. 6:2). God wanted Joshua to **look** at something. He wanted Joshua to **examine evidence** that would warrant the following conclusion: "I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour" (Jos. 6:2). What was the evidence? "Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in" (Jos. 6:1). "The city was tightly secured against the impending Israelite attack," and the "gates were closed and closely guarded so that no one was able to enter or leave" (Winton 29). Fear gripped Jericho's inhabitants because of all that God had already done for Israel. This was evidence that God would give Israel victory. Joshua could already see this evidence, for the testimony of the spies had declared as much: "Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Jos. 2:24). God has always supplied sufficient evidence to establish faith in the eye of the objective beholder.

Consider another individual from Joshua 6 and Hebrews 11 who shows the link between faith and evidence: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31). Faith saved Rahab's life because she received the spies, but why did she receive the spies? In her own words:

And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath. (Jos. 2:9-11)

Rahab received the spies because she had examined the evidence of Israel's Red Sea crossing and their recent victories over the Ammonite kings, and she concluded that only the God of Heaven could have accomplished such feats. This evidence moved her to hide the spies and to make the following request,

Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD , since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. (Jos. 2:12-13)

Evidence moved Joshua to trust that God had already delivered Jericho into their hands. Evidence moved Rahab to trust that her only hope was to put her life in God's hands. Faith thinks about the evidence God has supplied and then concludes that God can be trusted.

Faith Withstands Fake Facts.

This faith-building biblical event has been the target of much scrutiny from some who would cast doubt on the Bible's legitimacy. Scripture's record yields a date of about 1407 BC for Jericho's fall. The well-established date for the beginning of Solomon's reign is 971 BC, and he began building the temple four years later in 967 BC (1 Kin. 6:1), which was 480 years after Israel's 1447 BC exodus from Egypt. Forty years of wandering puts Israel's arrival in Canaan at 1407 BC (Jos. 5:6). However, some modern experts assert that the Israelites entered Canaan either centuries earlier or centuries later than 1400 BC, thus rendering the biblical chronology inaccurate. Others suggest that if Israel indeed entered Canaan through the Jordan River Valley around 1407 BC, there was no walled city of Jericho to conquer, thus rendering the biblical account of Jericho's fall to be a fabrication. Consider the evidence.

Recorded archaeological efforts began in Jericho in 1867 when British engineer Charles Warren identified Tell es-Sultan as the site of Jericho ("Did the Israelites"). Major excavations began forty years later with the Austro-German team of Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger ("Did the Israelites"), who concluded Jericho "was unoccupied during the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200)" (Hoerth 209). They believed there was no walled city to conquer in 1407 BC.

British archaeologist John Garstang excavated at Jericho from 1930 through 1936 (Free 112). He discovered remains of the early city of Jericho, which he called "City IV," and concluded that Jericho's City IV came to an end around 1400

BC in accord with the Bible record (“Did the Israelites”). Garstang’s conclusions derived from scarab evidence: small, beetle-shaped Egyptian amulets with inscriptions showing Jericho’s cemetery was active from the 18th through the early 14th centuries BC (“Did the Israelites”). The absence of highly-common Mycenaean pottery gave further evidence: “[Mycenaean pottery] began to be imported from the Aegean area about 1400 BC, and yet only one small fragment of this pottery was found inside the city, where the excavators examined more than 150,000 pieces of other types of pottery” (Free 112-113). Garstang wrote: “In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative” (as quoted in “Did the Israelites”).

After defending his findings in 1948 against an array of dissenting scholars who, according to Garstang, lacked first-hand knowledge, logical reasoning, and objectivity in their opinions conflicting with his conclusion (Free 112), Garstang enlisted rising British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon to review and update his findings (“Did the Israelites”). Kenyon agreed, reviewed Garstang’s work, arrived at different conclusions, and ultimately conducted her own excavations at Jericho from 1952 to 1958 (“Did the Israelites”).

Kenyon’s excavations contributed greatly to the current understanding of Jericho’s walled defense system, clarifying the existence of the 15-foot lower revetment wall of stone, the 26-foot mud-brick wall atop the stone revetment wall, the earthen rampart sloping upward to the city proper, and the similarly-sized upper mud-brick inner wall around Jericho’s city proper (“Did the Israelites”). She also showed the upper wall to be far older than originally thought, dating to 3000-2000 BC (Free 111-112).

In dating the destruction of the walls, Kenyon estimated that the city fell at the end of Middle Bronze Age II (around

1550), thus concluding that “there was no walled city of Joshua to conquer” (Hoerth 209). This cast much doubt on the biblical record for, as Brantly observed, “Kenyon’s conclusions supported neither the early (1400 BC) nor the late date of a military conquest (1230-1220 BC).”

Kenyon’s fieldwork at Jericho ended in 1958, but her published findings were limited to a popular book written before the fieldwork was completed, some preliminary reports, and scattered articles, with no detailed evidence. (“Did the Israelites”). After her death in 1978, her detailed evidence finally became available with the publication of the excavation’s stratigraphic data in 1981 and two volumes on pottery in 1982 and 1983. This enabled her work to be independently reviewed by archaeologist Bryant G. Wood.

Wood observed, “Kenyon based her opinion almost exclusively on the *absence* of pottery imported from Cyprus and common to the Late Bronze I period” (1550-1400). Choosing to emphasize imported ceramics in her dating method, “Kenyon’s analysis was based on what was *not* found at Jericho rather than what *was* found.” The problem with this approach was that Cyprus pottery, while common to tombs and wealthy urban centers along the trade routes of the day, was exotic and would have been less common in the border fortress of Jericho, a “small site well off the major trade routes of the day” (Did the Israelites). Kenyon herself described the location as a place of “simple villagers” with “no suggestion at all of luxury” and called Jericho “something of a backwater, away from the contacts with richer areas provided by the coastal route” (as quoted in “Did the Israelites”). Furthermore, Kenyon’s excavation was limited to two 26-foot by 26-foot squares between the city’s inner and outer walls, an area where the poorest residents would have dwelt. “She based her dating on the fact that she failed

to find expensive, imported pottery in a small excavation area in an impoverished part of a city located far from major trade routes!” (“Did the Israelites”). Backdating Jericho’s destruction by 150 years because of the absence of Cyprus pottery in low-income areas is as illogical as exploring a family shanty from the Great Depression of the 1930s and concluding it had been unoccupied since 1783 because no Waterford Crystal was found in it!

Further impugning Kenyon’s methods is that her review of Garstang’s findings seems to have ignored a considerable amount of pottery that appeared to be Late Bronze I (1550-1400), “precisely the period Kenyon repeatedly said was absent at Jericho!” (“Did the Israelites”).

Garstang found a considerable quantity of pottery decorated with red and black paint which appears to be imported Cypriot bichrome ware, the type of pottery Kenyon was looking for and did not find! . . . At the time of Garstang’s excavation, the significance of this type of pottery was not recognized, so it was simply published along with all the other decorated pottery without being singled out for special notice. It showed up in erosional layers on the east side of the tell. Evidently it originated in a large structure upslope, which Garstang referred to as the palace. (“Did the Israelites”)

Exotic Cyprus pottery from around 1400 BC was apparently present in Jericho, but in areas linked to the palace unearthed by Garstang, not the slums excavated by Kenyon!

Further findings also support Scripture's record of Jericho. For instance, the Bible depicts Jericho falling at harvest time after a seven-day siege, and Israel's soldiers were not permitted to take spoils because the city was to be burned in dedication to the Lord (Jos. 6:17-18). Typically invading armies spoiled a city of supplies, especially grain and food commodities, but not so with Jericho. "Large stores of grain were discovered, indicating that the city did not undergo a long siege, but was quickly taken before the food supplies could be consumed" (Winton 34).

The evidence supports the Bible, and the Bible supports the evidence. The walls that fell by faith supply evidence to confirm faith. The facts support faith, and faith supports the facts.

Faith Trusts

Jericho's walls fell by "faith." *Faith* is from the Greek *pistis*, pertaining to persuasion, moral conviction, and reliance (Strong, "Pistis"). Persuasion, conviction, and reliance all require trust. Faith looks at the evidence and **thinks**. After being persuaded by the evidence, faith **trusts**.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Persuaded by the evidence, faith trusts in God's existence: "He is" (Heb. 11:6). Convinced by the evidence, faith trusts in God's benevolence: "He is a rewarder" (Heb. 11:6). Relying on this evidence, faith trusts in God's acceptance: with faith a man can "please Him" (Heb. 11:6). Based on the evidence, faith trusts God.

Faith Trusts God's Power.

After directing Joshua's attention to the evidence he could "see" by beholding the fear gripping Jericho (Jos. 6:1-2),

and before instructing Joshua as to **what Israel must do** (Jos. 6:3-5), God informed Joshua of **what He had done** (Jos. 6:2): “I have given into thine hand Jericho” (Jos. 6:2). God’s mind had decided this and God’s might would accomplish this.

Joshua’s absolute trust in God’s power can be seen in his words when the priests blew the trumpets on the seventh day: “Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city” (Jos. 6:16). The walls had not yet fallen, but Joshua’s trust in God’s power moved him to describe victory with the same certainty that God expressed. He described the city’s still-future fall as though it had already happened. Joshua trusted God’s might to do what God’s mouth said He would do.

Faith Trusts God’s Plan.

Mortal men can perceive only so much, and thus mortal man’s battle plans can go only so far. Dwight D. Eisenhower noted: “In preparing for battle I have always found the plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” Colin Powell once said, “No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.” As Robert Burns wrote, “The best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry.”

Not so with God’s plans. To label God’s battle plan for Jericho as unorthodox would be an understatement. For six days they were to march two and a half miles to Jericho in parade formation, spend approximately an hour or more circling the city once while trumpets played, and then maintain parade formation for two and a half miles back to Gilgal. On the seventh day, they were to continue compassing the enemy seven times, spending over seven hours circling the city in utter silence, and then they were to shout with all that they had at the sound of the trumpets.

Joshua could have posed objections: Lord, my parents never taught me that; Lord, the other (denomi)nations do not practice this approach; Lord, I cannot see how that could

defeat an enemy; Lord, we trust in your power so much that we will hold to the man and not the plan. Thankfully Joshua trusted God; therefore, such faithless and foolish words never left his lips.

Faith Trusts God's Presence.

God's presence is subtly emphasized throughout this event. First, Joshua stood on holy ground as he spoke with the Lord (Jos. 5:15): God's presence was with Joshua. Second, God's ark was to be in the procession that encircled Jericho, the mercy seat atop the ark being the place where God met with men (Exo. 30:6), "the visible throne of the invisible God Who dwelt among His people" (Keil and Delitzsch).

Those who bore trumpets in front of the ark were said to have "passed on before the Lord" (Jos. 6:8): God's presence was among Israel. Third, the "ram's horns" were the *yowbel*, often translated "jubilee" (Strong, "Yowbel"). These were the loud jubilee horns used to declare God's presence upon Sinai (Exo. 19:13; Exo. 19:16; Exo. 20:18); thus God's presence was trumpeted to the enemy.

Every detail of the battle plan was a reminder that God's presence was with His people. Their trust in God's presence is seen in every step of every soldier on every day of that week.

Faith trusts God's power, God's plan, and God's presence.

Faith still trusts in God's power today. God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). God's Word still has the power to change hearts. God's Gospel still has the power to save souls. God's providence still has the power to raise and topple nations. Christians who truly believe this (faith) will act like it! They will pray for opportunities to reach the wicked strongholds of the hearts of the lost!

They will pray for the seed of the Word to spring forth in the hearts of those who have hitherto allowed the seed to be stolen, stifled, or scorched out of their hearts! They will pray for God's Word, not politicians or parties, to accomplish that which God sent it to do by replenishing the world with holiness and exalting this nation with righteousness! God has the power! He is able!

Faith still trusts in God's plan today. God has a plan for salvation, and those who obey Christ's Gospel do so because they trust God: "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God" (Col. 2:12). God has a plan for soul-winning, and those who trust God's plan share His Gospel (Mark 16:15-16). The Gospel has the power to save **everyone** (Rom. 1:16), but it has no power to carry itself to **anyone** (Rom. 10:14-15). God has a plan for His church, her worship, and her work, and true faith trusts God enough to hold to the simple pattern found in God's Word rather than compromise with man's wants!

Faith still trusts God's presence today. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phi. 2:13). Paul said that Christ lived in him (Gal. 2:20). Jesus promised that He was in the midst of those who were unified in His name (Mat. 18:20). The God of Israel did not become the God of deism at the end of the apostolic age! The same God is still providentially involved in the affairs of mankind, and He is still with those who are with Him! O, that Christians truly believed this! If they truly trusted God's presence, they would teach their children to worship in God's presence instead of distracting them during an assembly! If they truly trusted God's presence, they would live every moment of their lives with the same conscientiousness of their words and actions as they do when they are assembled with the saints! If they truly trusted God's presence, elders

and preacher would not have to beg members to read their Bibles. If they truly trusted God's presence, prayer would be a constant forethought instead of an occasional afterthought!

Faith trusts God, and it is evidenced by how a person lives, which leads to the next point.

Faith Toils

Would Jericho's walls have fallen if Israel only marched six days? Would the walls have fallen if Israel had used tambourines instead of trumpets? Would the walls have fallen if the trumpets came after the ark instead of the ark coming after the trumpets? Would the walls have fallen if the people shouted every day instead of the specific time appointed? Would the walls have fallen if Israel had chatted among themselves daily as they circled the city (Hey, that order to be quiet came from Joshua, not God, right?))? Would the walls have fallen if Israel opted to march once per day for thirteen days and then to circle the city seven times on the fourteenth day? Would the walls have fallen if Israel compassed Jericho once a day for six days, seven times on the seventh day, and then sat down on the grass and softly sang *Kumbaya*? The obvious answer to each of these questions is a resounding No! Why? Because changing any of these would have been to alter God's battle plan. They trusted God's plan enough to follow it!

Did Israel earn the victory over Jericho? Did they merit the falling of Jericho's walls by marching? Not according to God, for He told Joshua, "I have given into thine hand Jericho" (Jos. 6:2). God called it a gift. Joshua agreed with God: "Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city" (Jos. 6:16). Yes, they had to march. Yes, they had to walk without talking for six days, and then for six rounds on day seven. Yes, the trumpeting priests had to blow, the ark-bearing priests had to

carry, and the men of war had to shout. None had to attempt to breach or scale Jericho's defenses, an attempt which would have brought much death.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom. 6:23). God had given Jericho into the hands of Israel as a gift, but they still had to go get the gift. Suppose a man gets a call from the radio station saying, “Congratulations, you have won \$500 in a drawing; you just need to come to the station and collect your prize!” If he does not go to the station, will he get that money? No sir. If he goes to the radio station, has he earned that money? No sir. It is still a gift, even if he had to go get it. So it was with Jericho. So it is with eternal life through Jesus Christ.

“For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). By the grace of God, a gift is available to everyone, but faith must motivate each soul to receive God's gracious gift. “Not of works; lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9). He who obeys the Gospel cannot brag of any meritorious accomplishment; all he did was go get a gift.

When Israel did what God instructed, God did what He promised. He said when the people shouted, “The wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him” (Jos. 6:5). This is exactly what happened: the walls fell outward, and the rubble created a ramp at the base of the lower retainer wall, allowing Israel to “ascend up every man straight before him” (Jos. 6:5). “Kenyon herself discovered piles of bricks that had fallen down from the revetment wall surrounding the city . . . and that would have enabled attackers to climb up into the city” (Free 112). “An Italian team excavating at the southern end of the mound in 1997 found exactly the same thing” (“The Walls”).

Faith toils, and when it does, God grants far more rewards than efforts could earn. Indeed, “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Faith Triumphs

God promised the victory and provided the strategy. Military genius Sun Tzu wrote, “Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.” How sweet it is to know the battle is won before it starts! This is the assurance God gave Israel. Israel trusted God’s promise, and Jericho’s walls fell by faith.

So it was for those following Joshua. So it is for those following Jesus. John wrote, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). For those who march with Jesus, the victory is already won, for He told His apostles, “[B]e of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In the words of Paul, “But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

The victory is already won! Souls need not guess to determine which side is likely to triumph, for the triumph has been achieved. The question is, for which side will each soul fight? Those who truly trust God will enlist in His host and enjoy the rewards of being on God’s side, whereas those who opt to serve sin and the devil show that they do not really believe that Jesus has already attained the victory.

Conclusion

Joshua had asked the messenger with drawn sword: “Art thou for us, or for our adversaries” (Jos. 5:13). The reply: “Nay, but as the captain of the host of the LORD am I now

come” (Jos 5:14). Too often people wonder whether God is on their side and fail to ask the real question: Am I on God’s side? Faith destroyed Jericho’s walls, not because God was on Israel’s side, but because they were on God’s side.

The fall of Jericho’s walls is no mere allegory. The demise of Jericho’s defenses ought never to be confused as just a case study for military tactics. Jericho’s walls fell by faith; therefore, those walls ought to be a reminder of God’s relationship with His people—a relationship of faith that thinks about the evidence, trusts God, toils to God’s glory, and triumphs in God’s victory.

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Special Forces

Deacons: Elite Forces

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When people think of Special Forces, their minds likely drift to different areas. Some may visualize movies and television, as filmmakers have always had a fascination with creating their brand of military super heroes. However, real Special Forces have served a particular purpose dating back hundreds upon hundreds of years. For example, Qin Shi Huang (246-210 BC), the first emperor of the Qin dynasty, had a tomb constructed for the afterlife. In order to protect the tomb and himself beyond the grave, he had more than 6,000 Terracotta warriors (tomb warriors) built as a “spirit army.” The original warriors stood approximately six feet tall and arranged in battle sequence. Each statue was brightly painted and armed with a crossbow, sword, or other weapon. No two were alike. Each had unique details

to its armor, dress, and personality. It was for these reasons that archaeologists believe the figures were a portrait of a real elite Legion of the Qin Empire (“The Mission”). Likewise, Cyrus the Great had an elite set of warriors known throughout the ancient world as The Immortals. Alexander the Great had a Special Forces unit called the Companion Cavalry which he inherited from his father, Phillip II. Today almost every branch in every nation has an elite group made up of battalions and companies, weapons specialists, medics, communications sergeants, paratroopers, and such like.

Consider then the great value of having an elite task force assigned to specific operations of the local congregation. Since the body of Christ has never been presented as a hodgepodge of unorganized cell groups under human authority, it becomes imperative that the church upholds the pattern and organization He purposed for it. Deacons fill such an important responsibility.

Deacons Satisfy The Divine Organization Of The Church Of Christ

The term *deacon* comes from the Greek work *diakonos* (διάκονος) which means “attendant or servant.” He is a particular servant for a particular work. When the church was in her early stages, deacons were appointed to attend to certain undertakings. It is vital to understand that deacons are servants, not overseers. G. C. Brewer concluded in his writings, “It is generally agreed that it was the work of the deacons to look after the temporal affairs of the church, while the elders overlooked its spiritual affairs” (100). Leroy Brownlow wrote, “It has been said that the work of elders was spiritual and the work of deacons was physical, but their works cannot be limited to these spheres” (43).

Robert R. Taylor emphatically points out,

Let the student keep firmly fixed in mind that elders AND deacons are not over the church . . . There is no Scriptural support for a commonly expressed contention that elders are over the spiritual aspects of the church and deacons are over the physical aspects. The elders oversee ALL the work of the church ALL the time. Grave and irreparable damage is done to the cause when deacons act like elders and elders allow them so to act. (46)

Every Christian is a deacon in an unofficial capacity. They are to be servants. Paul wrote, “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea” (KJV, Rom. 16:1). Phebe was a servant but not in an official capacity. Elders and deacons the way Paul describes are officers in the congregation who fill sanctioned positions. He wrote, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phi. 1:1). Deacons do not have authority over the congregation and must understand they are under the oversight of the elders. However, they are deserving of honor and dignity. Paul wrote, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). A good degree means they are trustworthy. They will be able to earn the confidence of members. Having a great boldness in the faith enables them not only to carry out faith in their

own lives, but also to encourage others to carry out the faith in their lives.

Deacons Must Meet A Certain Criteria

Not just any man can step in to the role. Whereas the military have physical and mental requirements for their special forces, the Lord's church has spiritual requirements that define one's character and readiness. Paul instructs Timothy in the way he should select them.

A deacon must "be grave" (1 Tim. 3:8). This means he must be a man with honest report. It infers a righteous attitude. He should be a man who takes his service to the Lord seriously.

A deacon is "not doubletongued" (1 Tim. 3:8). The word used here is *dilogos* (δίλογος) and it does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It means speaking one thing and meaning another or telling a different story. In other words, a deacon is not to talk out of both sides of his mouth. He is not to be two-faced. They should be men who can be relied on for the exact truth of what they say and for the exact fulfillment of their promises.

A deacon is "not given to much wine" (1 Tim. 3:8). They understand the evils of alcohol and refrain from it. Some attempt to argue that this permits them to have some wine as long as it is not in excess or just so they are not "drunk." However, there are a few factors to consider. How much is much? How drunk is drunk? At what point is one considered such? The conundrum is that no two people can agree, especially the drinker. The word *drunk* comes from the Greek word *methusko* (μεθύσκω) and literally means "to make drunk, to become drunk, intoxicate." It is the entire process of drinking fermented wine. The antonym is "to restrict one's freedom, exercise self restraint" (Zodhiates 954-955).

Further, when it comes to drinking alcoholic beverages, no one has ever gone to the Bible first and determined that people should be drinking. They have already had in mind the desire to drink, then attempt to find Scripture to justify their decision. The original translation of “much wine” in its proper context is defined as “wine in any respect.” It is noteworthy to compare it to the phrasing Solomon used. He wrote, “Be not over much wicked” (Ecc. 7:17). This does not mean that a little wickedness is permitted. It does not mean one can be wicked in moderation. Nor does it mean anyone can engage in social wickedness. On the contrary, he is saying do not be wicked in any form.

Solomon also wrote,

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. (Pro. 23:29-33)

A deacon is “not greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Tim. 3:8). They are not to be covetous, guilty of greed, or carnal in their desires. While it is not sinful to have possessions or even wealth, it is not the focus of a deacon. Deacons are spiritually minded, not physically. Imagine what valuable service one

could provide when he is not influenced by materialism. Like an elder, he would not be able to be bribed into doing anything that would compromise his spiritual fortitude.

A deacon is to “hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9). Not only does he love the Gospel of Christ, but also he knows what it requires and follows it with a pure heart. Lipscomb wrote,

A pure conscience is one that has not been corrupted by being misused and based by being violated or perverted. A man perverts and corrupts his conscience by doing what he believes to be wrong, seeing the truth and violating convictions of right. (150)

A servant who has been taught right and respects the authority of the Word of God is a significant asset to the work of the church.

A deacon must “be proved” and be “found blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10). These are mentioned together for a reason. It is important that elders and deacons are not to be inexperienced. A newborn Christian has not had time to grow in any of the qualifications listed and thus, has not had time to mature. The only way to do that is to be tested. Being found blameless does not mean sinless but rather, he learns how to harness his behavior and attitude so they are agreeable with the Gospel. The way for that to occur is to develop spiritually.

Finally, a deacon must be the husband of one wife, ruling his own children and house (1 Tim. 3:12). This means he must be married and not in an unscriptural marriage. Unlike the children of elders, there is not a listed requirement that the deacon’s children are to be faithful (i.e., baptized, age of

accountability). However, he must be able to show that he is able to manage his children and household well as a spiritual leader. Fulfilling his work as a husband and father at home will prepare him to fulfill his work within the church. There is also a set of qualifications for wives, who must “be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things” (1 Tim. 3:11). In context it would imply that this is for the wives of deacons. Slander is speaking a false accusation against one’s good name. Solomon wrote, “He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool” (Pro. 10:18). Unfortunately, this happens more than it should in the Lord’s church and can damage, if not destroy, the reputation of faithful members. Consider how profitable it is for a good man who wants to serve to be accompanied by a faithful woman.

The Consequences Of Not Meeting The Criteria

Suppose the military appointed men who were not properly trained or who lacked discipline to wear the uniforms and try to function within those elite squads. Not only would it compromise everyone’s security and safety, but it also could cause ample lives to be lost and cripple the integrity of the nation. Likewise, consider how dysfunctional the congregation would be if deacons did not treat each item with reverence.

Imagine a special servant who does not take his position seriously or who is not righteous or honest. What a hindrance he would be to the work of the church. What if he was double-tongued? A servant who is symptomatically deceitful could not be trusted when he says he has fulfilled any task given as his words would not be of any worth. His promises would not be believed. What if he was given to wine? Not only is a drinker a negative influence on others around him, but he

does not do an adequate job of representing the congregation, much less the church of Christ. What if a deacon was guilty of filthy lucre? A person who is greedy cannot be trusted with handling the funds of the church or counting the offering. What if a deacon was not committed to following the Gospel or put his own interests above the needs of the congregation? What if he was inexperienced or a novice? Any of these characteristics are a recipe for such an important office to fail. It is why they need to be chosen carefully.

What Deacons Are Not

Unfortunately, some have different and often confused expectations of the role of deacons. Because of that, it is helpful to acknowledge what a deacon is not. First, deacons are not simply some random group of men put in place so the elders or members can brag about how many deacons they have. Their installation is not merely a means to have their pictures seen on a wall or have their names in the bulletin. A deacon is not to be given his position as a title with an arbitrary purpose. Elders must choose wisely and ought to have something in mind specifically rather than just collect a handful of men to be there “just in case.” A good man who meets the qualifications will be eager to be put to work by the elders. Some congregations see certain needs in which it is necessary to install larger number of deacons while others may have less of a need.

A deacon is not an employee of the congregation. Those who regard deacons as if they are simply handymen or hired help disregard how the Bible has defined their responsibilities. They are special servants having been given distinctive tasks by those who oversee the congregation. While there may not be something for them to do all of the time, they are chosen with something in mind. Members need to treat deacons

fairly and respectfully. Some feel if they have something at home that needs to be done, they can just summon a deacon to show up when they call.

The office of a deacon is not a stepping-stone on the way to becoming an elder. Aside from the shepherds, the Bible does not have an example of any hierarchy that is authorized in the church of the New Testament. A deacon is not described in the Bible as an “elder in training” or a “junior elder.” While deacons occasionally become elders, and certainly it is a noble gesture to want to work towards such, it is not a prerequisite to be a deacon before operating in the leadership. Those who are looking for a title or some kind of prestige often reflect such a mindset.

A deacon is not to be a woman. Many denominations, along with change agents in the body of Christ, have evaded this by appointing women deacons or deaconesses. However, only two passages in the Bible hint of such an office. One is in regards to Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). Since *diakonos* can be either a formal or informal servant, an examination of context is needed. Nothing in this text would conclude that Paul was describing Phoebe as an official appointee. Paul references the other passage in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:11). This also is never stated to be an official appointee. Five contextual observations must not be overlooked. First, it is impossible for a woman to be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:12). Second, it would be absurd to switch from male to female deacons in the middle of a discussion without some clarification (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Third, wives of church officers are clearly and appropriately referred to since family conduct is relevant (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Tim. 3:12). Fourth, the word *likewise* simply means that wives are to exhibit similar virtues as their husbands without implying that they are to share the same office (1 Tim. 3:11). Finally,

lack of the possessive genitive with *gunaikas* ('of deacons') or 'their' does not rule out wives of deacons since neither is used in other cases where men/women are being described as wives/husbands (Col. 3:18-19; Eph. 5:22-25; 1 Cor. 7:2-4; 1 Cor. 7:11; 1 Cor. 7:14; 1 Cor. 7:33; Mat. 18:25; Mark 10:2). (Miller 252-253)

A deacon is not to be a child. Again this may seem like a fundamental criterion based on the need to "be the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:10), but some religious groups have mishandled this important detail. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints installs deacons at the age of twelve years old. Yet how many children at the age of twelve are married, have children, and manage their own homes? Moreover, the LDS Church rewards their young deacons with the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood. This coincides with their teaching that the Aaronic Priesthood was removed from the earth as part of their "Great Apostasy" doctrine, but was restored at a later date. On the contrary, it was not removed because of any Great Apostasy. It was removed because Christ removed it when He fulfilled the Old Law and was made the final blood sacrifice. Paul wrote, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14).

The Hebrew writer contended,

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should

rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. (Heb. 7:11-14)

The Value Of Deacons

The Value Of Deacons To The Elders

Since elders have much to manage, they can often feel overwhelmed and exhausted if there is not sufficient help. Having servants whom they can trust and to whom they delegate specific tasks relieves much pressure. Consider how deacons are mentioned with the leadership, even though they are not overseers (Phi. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3). There ought to be good chemistry between them. Elders need to understand that deacons are not just the men to do “the dirty work.” A spiritually sound eldership will appreciate the effort and skillset of those who are installed and not belittle or berate the office.

It is a blessing to the church when elders and deacons are in harmony. Most of the time they will work behind the scenes and do the things that no one else even thinks about until they see it. Building maintenance or grounds keeping do not take care of themselves. Upgrades or repairs can easily be managed by having deacons in place. Those who oversee the flock should have something particular in mind when appointing a deacon so they do not just have

an arbitrary function. For these reasons, deacons are the elite forces, working quietly and efficiently for the good of the congregation.

It is equally important to keep the members aware of what area each deacon is assigned if there is a regular need. For example, a place that has excessive traffic may have need of a deacon designated for transportation for visitors. It is not to say that any other member cannot help, but deacons are a sure way for the elders to know something will get done.

The Value Of Deacons To The Congregation

It is a great encouragement to the deacons when they are able to see how much their labor impacts the members. It is even more rewarding when parents and teachers can motivate young men to aspire to this great need.

Encouraging someone to become a deacon begins long before he reaches adulthood. The influence of godly parents should never be underestimated. As a young man is growing and his character is being molded, parents have the duty to instill a desire to serve others ... One way to encourage men to become deacons is to arrange for special Bible classes for potential and current deacons. These classes can be a great opportunity for showing the Biblical responsibilities of service, the traits of a servant, and the specific opportunities for service within the local congregation. We should seriously consider the use of these classes or special studies to train men to become deacons. (Tagtow 233-234)

One of the most meaningful ways to support faithful deacons is to offer assistance when possible. Though a deacon will understand his commission, it can be difficult to give attention to so many needs; he can be spread thin. Deacons are grateful for the willingness of the members to contribute. Paul wrote, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (NKJV, Gal. 6:9-10).

The Value Of Deacons To The Lord

No one understands the significance of a deacon better than the one who established the office. Paul wrote, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13). Deacons are trusted and held in high confidence not only by members, but also by the Lord. Men who live out their faith and encourage others to carry out their faith illustrate great boldness.

Conclusion

While deacons are indeed an elite force that enhances the efficiency of a congregation, they are often the unsung heroes. If they do their job properly, most members do not realize deacons are even working, yet the results of their efforts can be seen and enjoyed. Though deacons are not overseers, they certainly can be and should be spiritual leaders. They have a great opportunity to be godly examples to young men. The Lord’s church is always at her best when every member steps up to fulfill the roles that are needed.

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Atheism

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Earlier this year, *The Washington Post* reported there are literally no young people in Iceland who believe that God created the earth. According to a poll commissioned by the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, an association of atheists, exactly zero percent of Icelanders under the age of 25 said they believe that God had anything to do with creating the world. Instead, 93.9 percent believe the world originated because of the “Big Bang” without God’s help. The study also found that over 40 percent of young Icelanders were atheists. This follows the WIN-Gallup International “2013 Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism” which ranked Iceland among the “top ten” countries with atheist populations. Ten percent of all Icelanders claimed to be atheist when asked, “Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or

not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious person or a convinced atheist?” Also included on the “top ten” list were China (47% atheist), Japan (31% atheist), Czech Republic (30% atheist), France (29% atheist), South Korea (15% atheist), Germany (15% atheist), Netherlands (14% atheist), Austria (10% atheist), Australia (10% atheist), and Ireland (10% atheist). According to *The Economist*, “there are at least 500 [million] declared non-believers in the world—enough to make atheism the fourth biggest religion.”

Here in the United States, the number of young Americans who do not believe in God is on the rise. The 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted by The Pew Research Center found that 35 percent of Americans age 18-29 are not religious. In 2007, only 16 percent of Millennials said they were not religious. This follows a 2014 Gallup poll which found that only 28 percent of Americans between 18 and 29 said they believed that God created “humans in present form within the last 10,000 years.”

The American public, as a whole, is becoming more atheistic. The percentage of US adults who say they believe in God, while higher than in most industrialized countries, has declined modestly, from approximately 92 percent to 89 percent of the past seven years. The share of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” God exists has dropped even more sharply, from 71% in 2007 to 63% in 2015. According to the same Pew Research Center study, the percentage of all American adults who identify as atheists roughly doubled from 2007 to 2014 (from 1.6% to 3.1%). An additional 4.0% of Americans call themselves agnostics, up from 2.4% in 2007. Those who claim to belong to “nothing in particular,” increased from 10.3 percent in 2007 to 15.8 percent in 2014. This growing minority of Americans, commonly known as the “nones,” said they do not belong to any organized faith.

“Nones” have become even more secular in their beliefs with only 61 percent of “nones” claiming to believe in God, down from 70 percent in 2007. Combining all three groups, the Pew Research Center concluded 22.8% percent of Americans can be described as “nonreligious,” up from 10.3 percent only seven years earlier.

The most notorious atheists of our day include Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Sam Harris, and (the late) Christopher Hitchens. According to *The Wall Street Journal* (April 25, 2015) these new atheists claim the reasons for this rise of atheism is clear. First, in this rich global economy, atheists such as Tufts professor Daniel Dennett claim people do not need religion anymore because they are doing just fine on their own. In an article published in the Witherspoon Institute’s online journal *The Public Discourse*, Professor Robert T. Miller of the University of Iowa College challenges Professor Dennett’s claim that religion thrives when people are poor and miserable but goes into decline when living standards rise by pointing to China. While the economy in China is booming, so is Christianity in China. Likewise, Charles Murray in his book *Coming Apart* concluded that here in the United States affluent Americans are more religious and more likely to attend religious services than the impoverished.

Second, they claim religion’s claims are false, and in this new Information Age people are more readily learning that religion’s claims are false and there is no God and He certainly had no role in creation. In a *New York Times* (Apr. 9, 1989) book review Richard Dawkins wrote, “It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid, or insane (or wicked, but I’d rather not consider that).” This argument is not new: Karl Marx, who viewed religion as the opiate of

the masses, made similar spurious accusations. However, the new atheists are speaking louder and to younger audiences than ever before. In his book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, Dennett wrote, "Those of us who have freedom of speech will feel free to describe [parents' teaching creationism] as the spreading of falsehoods, and will attempt to demonstrate this to your children at our earliest opportunity." Although the arguments for God are getting stronger all the time, most colleges and universities have taken theism off the table. It is no longer open to debate. Even among our Christian colleges, fewer and fewer biology professors are willing to defend the biblical account of creation and to reject evolutionary theory openly. Sadly, most appear to have compromised their beliefs and have embraced theistic evolution putting the biology curriculum directly at odds with the Bible curriculum.

The evidence for God is so strong, it is irrational not to believe. I remember as a young man purchasing my own personal hardback copy of the Warren-Flew Debate. I read and reread every page and carefully studied Dr. Warren's meticulously drawn visuals. His sound arguments for the existence of God, and others like him, ultimately led Antony Flew, one of the leading atheists of his day, to change his mind and become a deist before he died. In more recent years, a new generation of evangelists such as Kyle Butt has stepped up to the debate podium. When facing such Christian apologists, renowned atheists such as Dan Barker often fail to advance their argument. In the Barker-Butt Debate, Barker all but conceded the debate. Rather than respond to Butt's arguments, Barker quickly got bogged down in a myriad of self-contradictory statements.

Butt has also debated other well-known atheists, such as Bart Ehrman, on state campuses such as Ohio State University. That such an event would be held on one of the

nation's largest campuses is, by itself, remarkable. Most universities do not acknowledge any serious philosophical debate, pro or con, about the arguments for the existence of God. Instead, the new atheist agenda is to convince students aggressively that belief in God is wholly irrational. They systematically misrepresent the teachings of the Bible and the beliefs and practices of most Christians out of ignorance, malice, or both.

Richard Dawkins admits his strategy is to focus less on serious scholarly work and more on hurling insults at Christians. "I am more interested in the fence-sitters," he wrote on his blog, *RichardDawkins.net*, "who haven't really considered the question very long or very carefully. And I think that they are likely to be swayed by a display of naked contempt. Nobody likes to be laughed at. Nobody wants to be the butt of contempt." In the documentary movie *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, Ben Stein exposed how the mainstream scientific community systematically suppresses academics who believe they see evidence of intelligent design in nature and who criticize Darwinism. The same public shaming is routinely employed against those who uphold the value of unborn human life and who dissent from politically correct views about the nature of marriage.

These new atheists' claims combine extreme forms of scientism and naturalism. Scientism is the belief that the only true "knowledge" is what can be demonstrated scientifically. In other words, we can only know what the natural sciences tell us. Similarly, naturalism is the belief that only the material world is real. Both scientism and naturalism are self-refuting since neither claim is something that can be established using scientific methods. Nevertheless, the new atheists who adhere to these twin beliefs insist there is no spiritual realm which means no God, no design, and no intrinsic purpose or

meaning to life. They do so, however, based not on knowledge, but on the fact that their philosophical presuppositions exclude the possibility of God. In blindly clinging to their philosophical prejudices, they ignore that something cannot come from nothing. The existence of creation, and in particular the human mind, demands a sufficient cause: an equal or greater mind. This argument, known as the cosmological argument, is not new. John Locke penned, “[It is] impossible to conceive that ever pure incogitative Matter should produce a thinking intelligent Being.” The Bible has this to say about these new atheists who refuse to honestly confront this argument:

they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. (ESV, Rom. 1:20-22)

As Christians, we know this intelligent being is God. Genesis 1:1 tells us that, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” We also believe we can make a rational case for the existence of God based on the evidence of God all around us. It is statistically impossible for the design, order, and complexity of the universe to have come about by blind chance. The only reasonable conclusion to draw from the evidence is this world is the result of the act of a loving, powerful Creator. This line of reasoning, known as the teleological argument, is used repeatedly in the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his

handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). In the New Testament, Paul wrote, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

The bottom line is that God encourages individuals to look at all of the evidence to determine the truth. While the Bible is our final authority, it is not our sole source of knowledge. The new atheists believe science is the only source of knowledge. Therefore, while their search for truth is limited by their own naturalistic assumptions, Christians are the real truth-seekers. God created us in His image, as rational beings, and the world He created is available to us to know. Not surprisingly, all of the great founders of modern science worked from a deeply Christian background.

In his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, philosopher Alvin Plantinga defends the rationality and sensibleness of Christian belief. He argues that Christians can more easily explain and make sense of the world we know than those who believe God had nothing to do with creating this world. Plantinga points to the regularity of nature and the laws of nature; the role of mathematics in understanding the universe; and the very possibility of inductive thinking as evidence of divine creation. Rather than limiting knowledge, the Christian worldview extends the domain of knowledge even further than an atheistic worldview.

Even though Christian belief is rational, it is still subject to possible objections or potential “defeaters.” One of the most common reasons for rejecting or giving up on Christian belief is religious pluralism. The new atheists are quick to point out that many religions besides Christianity conflict with Christian belief at one point. First, this ignores

universal nature of morality and ethics. As the University of Texas professor of philosophy J. Budziszewski persuasively argues, there are “things we can’t not know” due to the fact there are certain moral truths “as real as arithmetic” that are part of the equipment of a rational mind. This is a “moral” or “anthropological” argument for God. The fact there are people with non-christian beliefs does not automatically disprove Christianity. The Bible teaches that a truth-seeker who sincerely follows the evidence need not settle for a man-made myth or a fairy tale. Barnabas and Paul boldly declared to the crowd at Lystra, who worshipped the false god Zeus, that the true and living God “did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Similarly, Paul told the Athenians who, out of an abundance of caution, had built an altar to the unknown god, that it is God’s will that all mankind come to know Him. Here’s a brief excerpt of Paul’s compelling argument:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and

find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:24-27)

Finally, the Bible teaches there is only one true God and Christ is the only way to salvation. Jesus Himself declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Likewise, the apostle Peter confirmed, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Therefore, Christianity is not only exclusive, but rationally exclusive.

A second popular defeater argument deals with the problem of evil and suffering in the world. The new atheist claims that the existence of a loving God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil and suffering. However, the fact of suffering does not mean I cannot continue to hold to my Christian faith nor does the existence of evil make my belief irrational. It is also alleged that if an all-powerful God exists, and He refuses to put an end to evil and suffering, then He could not be good. Yet, it was mankind, not God, who introduced sin into the world (Rom. 5:12) as an exercise of free will. That God has not yet judged the Earth speaks volumes about His patience and mercy and goodness. The problem of sin should point us towards God—who has revealed His redemptive plan—not away from Him.

However, the new atheists also argue that the Old Testament stories of Job and God’s commands to the Israelites to utterly destroy their enemy and the New Testament story of Jesus’ death on the cross prove that the God of the Bible Himself causes evil. First, Job’s predicament did not cause him to abandon his faith so why should it cause us so much consternation? Ultimately, we must admit, as Job did, that we are not qualified to judge what God is doing. As Paul

explained, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” (Rom. 11:33-34).

Second, any condemnation of God’s command to utterly destroy a nation depends on the rest of what Christianity teaches about right and wrong. Hence, the entire defeater argument presupposes an objective standard of right and wrong that ultimately depends on God. If there is no God, then nothing can be classified as “evil.” If there is a God, who does only what is right (Gen. 18:25), then we must assume He has a benevolent purpose in permitting evil to endure for a while (Heb. 11:16).

Conclusion

This lecture has focused primarily on atheism as it is most commonly understood. In his final work *The Laws*, however, Plato identified three forms of “atheism.” The first form of atheism is the denial of the existence of God or of any supernatural reality—the topic of most of our discussion. The second form of “atheism,” according to Plato is the idea that God exists but does not concern Himself with human affairs—what we refer to as “deism.” However, even if we are not in danger of being persuaded by either one of these worldviews, there is a third arguably more deadly kind of atheism ready to take its place. According to Plato, this form of “atheism” believes there is a God and that God is concerned with human beings but that He is easily appeased. It is the belief that God places few moral constraints on human beings and only wants to reassure us that whatever we are doing is okay. Therefore, even if we are not led astray by the rhetoric of men like Dawkins and Dennett, we must be careful not to be lulled into compromise and complacency by

those who preach a different gospel. For many of us, the most dangerous form of atheism is not the belief that God does not exist. Rather it is the lack of belief—true coming to know God. We need to fight against the tendency to forget the word of the apostle John who declared, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). Instead, we need to take to heart Paul’s warning that God will “inflict[] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 The. 1:8).

Hills Not Worth Dying For: Matters Of Opinion

Cliff Goodwin



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Preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of the greatest works in the world! The Lord’s public ministry on earth consisted of preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” (KJV, Mat. 4:23; Mark 1:14). The Great Commission mandates the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world “to every creature” (Mark 16:15). It is God’s intent to save precious souls by the preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18-21). In fact, the indispensable nature of preaching in God’s redemptive plan is clearly set forth by the apostle Paul.

For whosoever shall call upon the name
of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall
they call on him in whom they have not

believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom. 10:13-17)

Not Preaching The Pure Gospel

One should expect a great weight of responsibility to be attached to such a glorious work, and there is indeed. The curse of Almighty God abides on those who, in their preaching, deviate from the pure and simple Gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-9). There are no reliable substitutes for the “old Jerusalem Gospel,” only counterfeits and perversions of sacred truth! For this reason, sermons should be saturated with Scripture. The doctrines and commandments of men have no place in true Gospel preaching. The teachings of men serve only to turn souls from the truth (Tit. 1:14; cf. Col. 2:20-23) and to bring destruction upon those who teach and preach such error (cf. 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Faithful Christians, too, must respect God’s insistence on purity when it comes to Gospel preaching. The apostle John clearly instructed his readers not to endorse or encourage those teachers who strayed from true doctrine.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth
not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not

God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 1:9-11)

Not Preaching The Whole Counsel Of God

Some Gospel preachers preach only truth, but they refuse to preach **all** the truth. They stay away from certain topics in the pulpit—topics that are known to be controversial in modern culture. Such men also fall short of the serious responsibility pertaining to the preaching of the Gospel. In speaking to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul acquitted himself of failure in this regard. He said, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). A preacher who knowingly withholds Scriptural instruction from his hearers, when spiritual threats and challenges are imminent, is guilty before God and has the proverbial “blood on his hands.” Ezekiel was clearly taught along these lines.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked

man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul. (Eze. 3:17-21)

A preacher who truly loves God and loves souls will not shirk the fullness of his responsibility. Instead, he will “rise up to the occasion,” faithfully addressing pertinent issues from the pulpit in light of the Word of God. Such labor will involve the “reproving, rebuking, and exhorting” that Paul commanded Timothy, and it must be done even when the hearers have “itching ears” (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Handling The Word Of God Deceitfully

The work of preaching the Gospel involves a sacred trust. The eternal consequences and ramifications are far too great for any preacher to go about his work lightly. The apostle Paul certainly understood this, and he strove to impress this fact upon younger Timothy. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness. (1 The. 2:3-5)

The apostle understood that the work of preaching could not be concerned with pleasing men. He was ever cognizant of God's watchful eye, and it was God's approval the apostle sought. A man of this mindset will be careful to be true to the Word of God in his preaching. He will not take liberties with the text, wresting (twisting) the Scriptures to his own destruction (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15-16). For this reason, Paul admonished Timothy saying, "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20).

It is true that preachers today do not possess the spiritual gifts given to inspired men in the first century—men like Paul and Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:6). Nonetheless, gospel preachers are to be produced in every generation. Paul told Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). In essence, Paul had taught Timothy; Timothy was to teach other faithful men; and these faithful men were to teach others still. The miraculous endowment would have ended with Timothy, inasmuch as he would have been unable to impart miraculous gifts to others. This, of course, is because Timothy was not an apostle (cf. Acts 8:18). Uninspired

preachers of the gospel (following, or subsequent to, the age of the apostles) must rely on the written Word of God as their inspired guide and for the inspired content of their preaching (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–4:2). In this way utmost respect must be given to the Sacred Text when it comes to preaching.

In his work as an apostle, Paul made it a priority to handle the Word of God in an honest and faithful way.

Therefore seeing we have this ministry,
as we have received mercy, we faint not;
But have renounced the hidden things
of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness,
nor handling the word of God
deceitfully; but by manifestation of the
truth commending ourselves to every
man's conscience in the sight of God. (2
Cor. 4:1-2)

This was Paul's practice because of the noble and humble attitude he possessed—the attitude manifested a few verses later in the same text. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Paul ever realized his subordination to the Lord, as well as the greatness of his task. He simply **had to be** faithful to the Word of God. Too much was “riding” on his efforts. Similarly, he expressed this responsibility to Timothy, “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **handling aright the word of truth**” (ASV, 2 Tim. 2:15; emphasis CG).

This kind of conscientious approach to the biblical text in one's preaching is especially important when it comes to matters of opinion. A faithful gospel preacher must be honest, not only with the text, but also with himself. He must

be extremely careful not to **impose** a particular meaning on a text in order to find “biblical grounds” for his opinion. This temptation can be great at times for virtually all who preach. Perhaps a good understanding of the different types of religious matters will aid one in successfully navigating matters of opinion in his work as a Gospel preacher (this, too, should aid all Christians). What are these different types of religious matters?

Matters Of Faith (Or Doctrine)

Matters of faith are matters of doctrine. Doctrine is defined as a body of teaching; thus, biblical doctrine consists of what is taught in God’s Word (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:9). These matters, then, can also be termed matters of faith because faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Matters that are clearly taught in the Word of God, whether explicitly or implicitly, are binding. Preachers are duty-bound to preach and teach these matters as such. All accountable hearers should receive such teaching, searching the Scriptures diligently themselves to make sure such things are true (cf. Acts 17:11).

Matters of faith are often described as “salvation issues.” The Bible’s teaching in these critical areas is disbelieved and disobeyed to the peril of one’s eternal soul! Gospel preachers simply **must not** waver in these areas. Such matters are clearly identified in the Bible by the wording with which they are addressed. Categories into which matters of faith might broadly be placed include salvation, worship, and morality. Some examples in each of these categories will likely prove helpful.

Salvation

It should be obvious that the Bible’s teachings concerning salvation constitute matters of faith. Further, it must be

remembered that conditions of salvation for those living on this side of the cross are recorded in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6-18; Heb. 10:9-10). Those living under the Christian dispensation will be judged by the perfect law of liberty (Jam. 2:12; cf. Jam. 1:25). What the Bible teaches regarding salvation and its terms for those living today must be faithfully and boldly proclaimed (cf. Acts 11:14; Acts 13:26).

The Bible makes it “crystal clear” that man’s salvation is dependent on Jesus Christ. He is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and “no man comes to the Father” but by Him (John 14:6). Peter faithfully proclaimed, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Paul further emphasized, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Any doctrine that detracts from the role of Jesus Christ as the only Savior constitutes fatal error.

But what of man’s required response to Jesus Christ? The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Savior of them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9). Therefore, proper doctrine concerning what man must do to obey Christ is a vital necessity. The New Testament records that belief in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), repentance of one’s sins (Acts 17:30), and confession of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Tim. 6:12-13) are all essential to one’s salvation. Further, the New Testament pattern demonstrates that all three are antecedent to one’s baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:37-38). A penitent believer, upon confession of Christ, must put Christ on in baptism (Gal. 3:27). The purpose, or objective, of such immersion in water is the remission of that individual’s sins by the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:16; cf. Col. 1:14; Rev. 1:5b). Matters such as these are not open to opinion. These matters directly affect a soul’s obedience to

Christ, and their essential nature is made clear by Scripture. Such are matters of faith.

Saved souls are not left by the Lord on “spiritual islands.” They are gathered into the family of God—the church (cf. Eph. 2:19-22; Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15). In fact, the very act that places one in Christ, spiritually speaking, is the same act that places one in the church that belongs to Christ. Baptism is this culminating act. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). To what were the three thousand souls added? “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47; emphasis CG). Again, the Bible’s teaching is clear. The one baptism that saves (Eph. 4:5; 1 Pet. 3:21) is the one baptism that adds one to the body of the saved, the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). Christ only built one church (Mat. 16:18), and He will return to save only that one church (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 4:4; Eph. 5:23). Thus, salvation and the church are inseparably linked.

Matters pertaining to salvation—whether regarding Christ, gospel obedience, the church, etc.—are matters of faith. These matters affect the eternal welfare of people’s souls and are clearly delineated in Scripture. Men’s opinions have no place in this realm.

Worship

Many view the area of worship as being “non-essential.” Such people suppose that any worship offered unto God is acceptable in His sight, so long as it is sincere and well-intentioned. The Scriptures, however, paint a different picture. As early as the times of Cain and Abel, God required worship that met His demands. Cain and Abel both came before God with their respective sacrifices, but Cain’s

worship was rejected while Abel's was accepted (Gen. 4:3-7). Later on in the New Testament, the Hebrews penman pointed out that the brothers' worship affected their standing and relationship with God. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). Whether or not the worshiper is accepted by God depends, in part, on the gifts rendered in worship. He who worships "by faith," offering to God what He has prescribed (cf. Rom. 10:17), stands to be commended by God. Those who deviate from God's directives in worship stand to be rejected and condemned.

Other Old Testament examples demonstrate the seriousness of approaching God in worship. Nadab and Abihu were destroyed when they offered strange, or unauthorized, fire before the Lord in the burning of incense (Lev. 10:1-2). One would be hard-pressed to convince Nadab and Abihu that proper worship is "non-essential." Later in Hebrew history, king Uzziah learned quickly that God's boundaries regarding worship were to be respected. The following passage records his transgression.

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee,

Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. (2 Chr. 26:16-21)

Old Testament examples such as these are cited, because Christians are to learn from the things written “aforetime” (cf. Rom. 15:4). Suffice it to say, true worship is not some kind of inconsequential “gray area.”

Jesus Christ taught that God's stringency regarding worship would continue throughout the Christian dispensation as well. His words to the Samaritan woman anticipated the requirements of New Testament worship.

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:19-24)

Many important points could be noted from the above text. First, one should consider the link between proper worship and salvation in verse twenty-two. If acceptable worship is an indicator of salvation, what would unacceptable worship indicate? Second, the Father is said to seek the worship of true worshipers (John 4:23). The term “true worshipers” implies the possible existence of “false worshipers.” If God does not seek the worship of “false worshipers,” what does that say about their standing with God? Finally, Christ placed a two-fold mandate on acceptable worship. He stated that worship **must** be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24; emphasis CG). What “must” given by God can a person refuse and still be found acceptable in God’s sight? The conclusion is clear: matters pertaining to acceptable worship are matters of faith.

Morality

The term *morality* is here used in reference to how one lives his life—whether his deeds and practices are right or wrong. The Scriptures make it clear that one’s salvation is affected by immoral practices. The apostle Paul demonstrates this fact in the following passages.

Know ye not that the unrighteous **shall not inherit the kingdom of God**? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, **shall inherit the kingdom of God.** (1 Cor. 6:9-10; emphasis CG)

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things **shall not inherit the kingdom of God** (Gal. 5:19-21; emphasis CG).

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting,

which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, **hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** (Eph. 5:3-5; emphasis CG)

Immoral practices jeopardize the souls of men. Therefore, these matters must be addressed from the pulpit, and such preaching does not fall under the realm of “opinion.” What the Bible teaches concerning morality constitutes matters of faith and/or doctrine.

The areas of salvation, worship, and morality are not necessarily intended to be exhaustive when it comes to matters of faith. Instead, these three major areas are cited in hopes of providing the prime characteristic shared by all matters of faith—the potential to jeopardize a person’s soul. If the Bible teaches any particular matter imperils a soul’s relationship with God—and thus his salvation—that is a matter of faith. When souls are “on the line,” gospel preachers must “toe the line” of God’s Word. There is no room for differences of opinion and no room for opinion to make its way into the pulpit.

Matters Of Congregational Expediency

In some instances God commands a certain action, but He leaves unspecified the means by which such an action may be carried out. He commanded Noah to build an ark, even specifying gopher wood as the construction material and mandating a number of other particulars (cf. Gen. 6:14-22), but which tools had to be used were not specified. In the absence of revelation concerning such incidentals,

Noah would have been at liberty to use tools he deemed to be most expedient for the task at hand. Similarly, the Great Commission commands the church to take the Gospel into all the world (Mark 16:15). Particular modes of transportation, however, are not dictated. Depending on the mission at hand, one might fly on a plane, ride in a car, or even walk on foot in order to go and preach the Gospel. In this way, expediency pertains to **how** the work of the Lord will be carried out.

As the work and worship of the Lord is carried out by a local congregation of Christ's people, many questions will arise involving the "particulars" of the work. What will be the service times on Sunday? How many songs will be sung? How many prayers? Who will preach, and will he be a full-time, "located" preacher? Will there be midweek services? Questions like these are numerous.

Who is to decide on such matters—matters that are not doctrinal in nature, but that affect the whole congregation nevertheless? The Bible's teaching places such matters in the hands of the local eldership. It is significant that the New Testament teaches there is a sense in which elders rule.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. (1 Tim. 5:17)

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. (1 The. 5:12-13)

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation . . . Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:7; Heb. 13:17)

Some mistakenly think that passages such as these teach that elders rule in matters of doctrine. This is **not** the case. It is true that elders are shouldered with the responsibility of seeing that Christ's doctrine is enforced and followed. But it is Christ Who rules in matters of doctrine, not elders. The doctrine is His, and it has already been legislated in the New Testament (cf. 2 John 1:9). Elders, then, are understood to rule in matters of congregational expediency. **How** is a local congregation going to expedite and carry out the work and worship that Christ has commanded? The local eldership rules in this area and must make such decisions.

Both preachers and members would do well to recognize matters of congregational expediency and to defer to the local eldership in these decisions. Decisions often have to be made in the local church that are not doctrinal and, thus, are not legislated in Scripture. Everyone usually has an opinion regarding such matters, but these are **not** matters of personal opinion. These are matters of expediency which affect the entire congregation and its work for the Lord. Elders must rule in these matters, and faithful members must submit to their decisions (cf. Heb. 13:17). One might disagree in his own heart regarding a decision reached by the eldership,

but such dissent should remain inward. Again, these are not matters of **sin** and **salvation**. One can inwardly disagree and still outwardly conform to the plan of work set forth by the leadership. Inward dissent need not become outward discord.

Matters Of Opinion

Matters unlegislated in the New Testament are not limited to questions of congregational expediency. Many unlegislated matters affect the individual—in personal decisions he must make and in considerations that affect his daily life. Such personal matters are truly matters of opinion. God’s attitude toward these things is clearly expressed in Paul’s inspired words, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision” (Gal. 5:6). In a similar vein Paul wrote, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). Under the Christian dispensation, circumcision is obviously not a commandment of God. Therefore, it **cannot** be practiced or bound as a religious rite with any spiritual efficacy whatsoever. But what if one is circumcised as an expedient to opening doors among the lost, as was Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)? Such was and is certainly acceptable—though not mandatory for salvation. What if one is circumcised for hygienic or medical benefits? This, too, is fine. So long as it is not performed as a compulsory, religious rite, circumcision is a matter of personal opinion. It matters not to God regarding the individual’s salvation.

The apostle Paul provides another example of a matter which is merely personal opinion. “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Cor. 8:8). Such words are wonderfully descriptive of true matters of opinion. They do not make any difference with God! God is far more concerned

with the attitude one possesses in such matters and with the manner in which he interacts with others over such issues. This is brought out in the greater context of First Corinthians chapter eight.

Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. (1 Cor. 8:1-2)

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the

weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? (1 Cor. 8:6-11)

Matters that are not legislated in Scripture, and that do not fall under the purview of a local congregation's functioning and working in the cause of Christ, are matters that should be left up solely to the individual. This is great liberty for the Christian! But with great liberty also comes great responsibility. Peter wrote, "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God" (1 Pet. 2:16). One must remember that his opinion is likely but one among many—and that other opinions are of equal value to his own. Therefore, one should never use his opinion as an "axe to grind" or a cause for contention (cf. Rom. 14:1-4). Further, certain opinions expressed in certain situations might serve only to stir up confusion. A faithful, mature Christian never wants to do anything that needlessly generates strife (cf. 2 Tim. 2:23).

To be inherently benign, matters of opinion can surely prove to be cancerous when pressed and promoted as if they were matters of faith. Gospel preachers are especially in need of this point. Opinions should never be bound as if they constituted God's law—and especially not from the pulpit. Certain situations might arise in which a matter of opinion needs to be addressed publicly, but the preacher doing so should be extra careful to make sure the hearers know and recognize such as **opinion** and not as **doctrine**.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most precious message this world will ever know. For good cause the apostle Paul could mention "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). The Truth which saves men's souls is truly worth dying

for. Every faithful, dedicated child of God should be willing to pay the ultimate price, if need be, for the cause of Truth. One only needs to distinguish between soul-saving truth and inconsequential opinion. Understanding that religious considerations fall into one of three categories might serve one well in this task. Matters of doctrine are in fact “salvation issues” and must be fiercely defended. Matters of congregational expediency relate to the work of the local church and must be deferred to the local leadership. Matters of opinion, however, are personal and should be given the leeway necessary to promote unity and love.

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Basic Training: New Converts And Teaching First Principles

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It would be remiss of me if I did not take a few lines of this manuscript to express my appreciation to the Southaven congregation for this opportunity. I have had a great deal of admiration and respect for the elders, preachers, and many of the members which I have had the opportunity to know through the years. To all who are associated with the great work here, I would like to say, Thank You!

War is a terrifying word. It conjures up images in our minds that have been implanted by the news media, documentaries, textbooks, and all kind of other sources. Each generation has a mental image of war that corresponds with the conflicts of its own time. Those images are brutal and painful. The cost of war is great, even upon the victor. The aftermath of war is likely the most vivid imagery that any of our eyes will ever see. That could be the reason that God chose to continually use war as a description for the Christian life.

While this great war between the forces of good and the forces of evil has been underway since the beginning, we are without doubt in the midst of a raging battle. From the recognition of homosexual unions to the praise of the transgendered for their “courage,” the forces of evil have taken as strong a hold as they have ever had in this nation’s history. The battle that is before us is intense and difficult, but our participation is critical and necessary.

The topic of this lectureship has never more applicable, nor has it been more needed. The Lord is truly in need of more willing “soldiers of the cross.” The challenge is for Christians to recognize that they are in the midst of a battle and that they need to pick up their armor and get in the fight. The topic under consideration is “Basic Training: Training New Converts and Teaching First Principles.”

Basic training for military service is a critical matter to any soldier so that he is able to transition from civilian life to the life of a soldier. Similarly, the soldier of the cross needs basic training to be able to transition from the life of a sinner to the life of a saint. That process is not easy, nor does it happen overnight. While there are resources for evangelism and for what constitutes first principles that the new convert needs, there are very limited resources for the process to help accomplish the training needed to transition out of the world.

As should take place with any important topic, one must begin with the Scriptures.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen. (NKJV, Mat. 28:18-20)

This passage is what we refer to as the “great commission.” It explains the overarching duty of the child of God: helping to spread the message of the Gospel. One important aspect of this verse that is sometimes overlooked is the Christian’s obligation to “make disciples.” Making disciples can be connected closely to the idea of basic training.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the term the Lord uses in this commissioning is **make disciples**. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, whatever that may mean or demand. (MacArthur 341)

The idea of *disciple* moves beyond just one who learns under another. It encompasses both thought and behavior.

Our duty to “make disciples” extends far beyond the baptistery. Many times, new converts are left with just enough faith to know what the Lord initially demands for salvation, but never moves beyond that surface-level knowledge. Those are the converts who are most likely to go back into the world because they have not continued to become a disciple.

Jesus’ supreme command, therefore, is for those who *are* His disciples to become

His instruments for making disciples of all nations. Jesus' own earthly ministry was to make disciples for Himself, and that is the ministry of His people. Those who truly follow Jesus Christ become "fishers of men" (Mat. 4:19). Those who become His disciples are themselves disciple makers. The mission of the early church was to make disciples (see Acts 2:47; 14:21), and that is still Christ's mission for His church. (MacArthur 341)

The purpose of this lesson is to dive into the idea of Basic Training so that the church might be better equipped to "make disciples." Let us look at the personal growth process, and see what the critical elements are. To examine this process, one must pay great attention to the book of 2 Peter and heed the exhortation to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

The Soldier's Foundation

What foundation is needed to help a disciple continue in his growth and training? "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:2-3). Notice that Peter began by expressing his prayer for the people. He wanted "grace and peace" to be "multiplied" to them according to knowledge. He continued to explain that God has given us what is necessary to live and be godly, "knowledge."

Knowledge is the critical, foundational element in a disciple's continued growth. The old cliché states that

“knowledge is power.” It is a cliché for a reason; it is true. While “knowledge is power,” knowledge of the Gospel brings one to “the power of God to salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Peter began this letter by emphasizing the importance of knowledge in the growth process. To emphasize his point, he not only began the letter dealing with the importance of knowledge, but he also ended the letter with the same thought, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Why did Peter emphasize this idea so much? Man needs direction. Not only does he need direction, but he also need repetition of the direction.

We Need Direction.

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Pro. 14:12; Pro. 16:25). Humans are notorious for doing things their own way. The problem with that is it never works out well. God has blessed us exceedingly by giving out of His knowledge what we need to direct and guide us through this world. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105).

Deity has not been deficient in supplying our needs. God’s power (dunamis or that term from which we derive dynamic, dynamo and dynamite) has supplied us all things pertaining to life and godliness. The former is God’s gift; it is vigor of soul possessed by man’s immortal nature or the inner man. Godliness is that spiritual imperative that permits a retention and precious preservation of the God-given gift. This sweeping apostolic affirmation but means that no modern day revelations are needed. (Taylor 71)

We can be comforted by the fact that God, through His immense love and grace toward us, was willing to give us His wisdom and guidance through His Word. When one looks to Scripture, he can recognize what he sees is a message from God. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

As a matter of spiritual priority, Peter desires that first and foremost they realize how Sacred Scriptures did not originate and how it did not come about into literary reality. Peter is speaking of Scripture whether of the Old Testament or the New Testament. Note the significance of the verb **is** or a present tense verb. No Scripture of either testament came by private interpretation. “Private” refers to what is one’s own; interpretation is explanation. The prophecies did not thus originate as a result of the prophet’s peculiar or personal explanation. He did not think them up; they are not his inventions to any extent of the term. (Taylor 75)

One’s knowledge of God’s Word can have a mighty effect on his life. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psa.119:11).

You, through Your commandments,
make me wiser than my enemies; for
they are ever with me. I have more

understanding than all my teachers, for
Your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the ancients,
because I keep Your precepts. (Psa.
119:98-100)

Knowledge can restrain one from sin and grant one great wisdom. “From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Knowledge is the mode of transportation that brings one from hopelessness to saving faith in Jesus.

If one wants to grow as a disciple, the most basic element of his training must be knowledge, which comes from the Word of God. Peter’s letter literally begins and ends with that exhortation.

We Need Repetition.

While knowledge is a critical element in the training process of a disciple, without retention, very little will come from the knowledge received. One of the basic laws of teaching and learning is repetition. We need things to be repeated to us so that we might remember them. We use apps on our phones, sticky notes, and lists of all kinds to help us remember important things. We use calendars to remember important dates. Without these things, we can become very forgetful.

Peter definitely recognized the importance of repetition in keeping people reminded of important pieces of knowledge.

For this reason I will not be negligent
to **remind** you always of these things,
though **you know** and are established

in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by **reminding** you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a **reminder** of these things after my decease. (2 Pet. 1:12-15; emphasis WA).

In these four verses, Peter put great emphasis on reminding these Christians of things they already knew. Many today seem to shy away from re-emphasizing the first principles. Some of that mindset has come because of the idea that they have moved beyond that type of teaching. While it is true that one should not remain in the first principles forever (Heb. 5:12-6:3), those fundamental matters do need to be reviewed regularly. As with any other type of knowledge, a lack of use will become a loss of the knowledge. The principle “use it or lose it” is very applicable to our basic Bible knowledge.

The lack of fundamental Bible knowledge has led to the destruction of many. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos. 4:6). The churches of Ephesus and Sardis had forgotten some very important things, so the Lord pleaded with them to “remember” (Rev. 2:5; Rev. 3:3). Some churches today have forgotten the fundamentals of the faith, which has led to all sorts of things of which God does not approve creeping into the church. We can never become so wise that we move beyond the fundamentals of the faith and fail to be an encourager of others to remember.

The Soldier's Motivation

Why must one keep growing and training himself to serve in the army of the Lord? What motivation should one have to continue to sharpen his skills and to help others do the same? It seems as if Peter answered the question of motivation. He even gave several reasons why one should be motivated to “grow in the grace and the knowledge” of Jesus.

Motivation Of Transformation

The soldier of Christ should be motivated because of the transformation he has undergone. Peter explained that the promises which God has given to us—by bestowing knowledge unto us—allows us to “be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). God has been so good to us that He has allowed us, through Jesus Christ, to partake of His nature and escape the corruptions of this world. That transformation should motivate us to continue growing.

The soldier must recognize that the transformation process is a continual process as he grows closer to God. Many times, the new convert is brought out of the watery grave of baptism (Rom. 6:3-6) and is immediately expected to act as a mature Christian. That simply does not happen! We are all like clay being molded by the potter. The children's song states an important truth: He's still working on me. We need to allow ourselves to be molded more closely to His will daily. We also need to help others to continue in that process.

Peter explained an important part of that continued transformation.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to

virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

He explained the process of adding precious attributes to the faith which we obtained through the knowledge that God has bestowed upon us.

He began with the attitude behind the transformation process. He pointed out that this growth process begins with diligence. Diligence connotes determination, zeal, and perseverance with which one accomplishes a task. We are to give great effort to add to our faith. He is assuming here an already existent foundation of personal faith.

Faith is the foundation. By it we have been justified (Romans 5:1); by it we walk (2 Corinthians 5:7); by it we please God (Hebrews 11:6); and by it we overcome the world (1 John 5:4, 5). Virtue is manliness, courage and vigor of soul; it is lion-hearted courage and bravery in the line of duty. Knowledge is a working acquaintance with truth. It is “understanding, prudence, discretion, practical knowledge” (J. Noel Merideth). Temperance is self-control or the control of self. Literally, it means to hold oneself in; it is the opposite of the very popular “let go” philosophy of the promiscuous and the profligate of our time. It is self-mastery, self-government

and the proper discipline of all the bodily passions and appetites. The Christian is not now minus passion and appetite; he is not a de-sexed being. He holds all under proper dominion. Patience is steadfastness, endurance, keeping on and a resolute refusal to surrender. Patience is spiritual toughness. When the going is rough the tough get going says it quite well. Godliness is reverence, piety and Godlikeness. It demands discharge of all duties we owe God. Brotherly-kindness derives from the Greek term of Philadelphia and means brotherly love. It is made up of one of the Greek words for love and the Greek term for brother. Charity (love—ASV) here is of one's ardent affection. It includes God, others, enemies, self, and all that is good and noble. This charitable characteristic permits one to be a lover of good (Cf. Titus 1:8). (Taylor 71-72)

Because of God's great love for us and His willingness to transform us, we should be willing to follow the road map that He has laid before us. That map leads us to the attributes that will help us continue the transformation process. The more one is transformed into the image of His Son, the more motivation he should have to continue the process.

Motivation Of Affirmation

The soldier's motivation continues as he recognizes that continued growth leads to an affirmation that he is going in the right direction.

For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:8-11)

Peter built on the explanation of the transformation process with the idea that assurance is available. We often sing "Blessed Assurance," but how often do we really feel the assurance that God provides? One learns that if we are in the process of continued growth that is explained in verses five through seven, we will be fruitful, we will know our calling and election is sure, we will never stumble, and we will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Growth, and the diligent effort to bring it about, builds assurance and affirms our righteous state. That affirmation ought to give us great incentive to continue to grow.

Motivation Of Identification

As we continue to grow, we will be more able to spot those things which are not true. Paul encourages the Christian to "test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 The. 5:21-22). The knowledge that we build will allow us to identify more easily those things which God has neither taught nor approved. Peter spent a great deal of time in the second chapter of his second letter teaching

us to watch for false teachers. That warning is just as true today as it has ever been. With the advent of mass media and social networking, everyone has a voice that can be heard throughout the world. While that is a very positive thing for the ability to spread the Gospel, it should make us very wary of what we read, especially in the spiritual realm. The ability to identify those things which are false and differentiate them from the truth ought to be an immense motivating factor in our growth. The soldier needs to be able to identify whose side he is on as he fights.

Motivation Of Preparation

The soldier's motivation for growth should be furthered by the need to be prepared for the second coming of Christ. Many in Peter's time were beginning to deny the second coming. He explained that there would be "scoffers" who were willfully forgetting those fundamental teachings that would have helped them see the reality of the second coming. Peter reminded them that God always keeps His promises.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:8-9)

Because the Day of Judgment was sure, he asked, "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Pet. 3:11-12). The fact of the Lord's coming and judgment should motivate us to keep growing so we might

be prepared. Preparation is one of the soldier's greatest goals, and that should be true for the soldier of Christ as well.

Motivation Of Glorification

Peter closes his letter with possibly the greatest reason for our responsibility to grow. "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Simply stated, we should be motivated to grow because our growth brings glory to God. What greater good can anyone do than that? The duty of a soldier is to "please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4).

The Needed Application

We have noticed the importance of continued growth, the importance of being reminded of foundational principle, and the importance of our motivation to grow. The final thing that must be discussed is a plan to put all of those principles into action. When looking into the phases of Basic Training for various branches of the United States' Armed Services, the author found three phases which were abundantly clear: the assimilation phase, the acquisition phase, and the action phase. These phases can be very useful for the church to develop a plan for basic training or "making disciples."

Assimilation Phase

Assimilation into the church is critical for the new convert. This is where the illustration of the church as a family can be extremely important. To assimilate into a congregation necessitates that one builds close relationship. While our willingness to draw close to God is of the utmost importance, we must also draw close to one another. Jesus stated that the world will know His disciples because of "love for one another" (John 13:35).

Church members must be willing to build relationships with new converts for them to be more likely to maintain

their relationship to the Lord. The rise in gang activity that was taking place in the late 1990s was largely attributed to the dissolution of the family unit in urban areas. Those who studied those activities say that many of the individuals who joined gangs were simply looking for a place to belong and feel, some for the first time, what it means to be a family. The church needs to be diligent in its role as a family. That understanding, which will result in the church acting like a family, will attract many who are looking for a place to belong. If we do not show the love of Christ to those who are in the church, as well as those who are outside, we might need to go back and be reminded of some of the first principles ourselves. We are the “household of faith”; we need to make sure we act like it.

Acquisition Phase

The second phase of Basic Training is an acquisition phase. It is a period of intense learning. One needs to become acquainted with the routines and rules of military life, as well as the need to become acquainted with the weaponry. That is as true in the church as it is in the military.

Several passages in the New Testament explain the need for one to be spiritually mature before acting in certain ways (cf. Gal. 6:1). Just as anyone who uses a weapon should be well-versed in the handling of that weapon, the “sword of the Spirit” can be a dangerous tool in the hand of one who is ill-equipped to handle it. We need to help new converts understand the importance of acquiring the knowledge needed to perform the task of fighting the “good fight of faith” adequately (1 Tim. 6:12). One does not need to know everything to live the Christian life, but he does need to have a firm foundation that allows him not to be moved. In the early stages, he will hear a great deal of repetition. While that need may decrease some over time, the need

to be reminded of those things we have already learned will never go away.

Action Phase

The action phase is when the knowledge gained is put into action. While there needs to be a period of learning, we all must move ahead in acting upon our faith in Jesus. We must know that “faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2:20). Sometimes, the new convert is going to be unsure how to accomplish an action. That is where our example becomes so important. Many follow the old statement, Do as I say and not as I do. That does not work for the Christian soldier. Those who have more experience and more maturity need to be the ones who lead others into battle. If the mature are not putting their faith into action, the chances of a new convert pushing forward and moving ahead becomes much less likely.

Conclusion

Christians are soldiers of Jesus Christ. As soldiers, it is our duty to help train the next wave of soldiers. While the church is a kingdom which “will never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44), the church in individual locations will be hurt tremendously if we do not fulfill our duty to train more Christian soldiers. Are we up to the task? Will we put the time in to train ourselves and others? While that decision is up to each individual, one thing we can know. Jesus wins, and those who are soldiers of the cross will gain the victory through Him. If you want the victor’s crown, you cannot get it by sitting on the sidelines. Get in the fight!

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Blessed Is The Nation Whose God Is The Lord

Don Walker



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Jesus' purpose, yea, His whole being was, in His Own words, "to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work" (KJV, John 4:34). In so doing, He sought out John the baptizer and submitted to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mat. 3:15). From there "was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Mat. 4:1). We have record of three temptations, the last of which is recorded in these words:

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
(Mat. 4:8-9)

In each of the three recorded temptations, Jesus responded by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy, thus overcoming the temptation of Satan and remaining a pure, unspotted sacrifice for our sin. In fact, He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He never succumbed to the temptations of the devil and remained as a “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). This is truly good news for He was offered, raised, and now reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings. He now reigns over far more than just the kingdoms of this world, for he was raised “[f]ar above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1:21).

What is also interesting about the third recorded temptation is the implication made by the devil. The devil offered the kingdoms of the world as if they were his to offer. At the moment of this promise of Satan, no words ever rang more true than Jesus’ words in John 8:44,

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

The devil’s words were a bold attempt to usurp the authority of the Great Sovereign.

God Alone Is Sovereign

Scripture very clearly proclaims that God Almighty is the only Sovereign. That is to say that He, by reason of

creation, has the right to rule over His creation. Not only does He have that right, but also He chooses to exercise that right. The decree that Nebuchadnezzar would have a “beast’s heart” was “to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:16-17). Again in Daniel 4:25 we read,

That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

We can rejoice that the truth stated above is not only an Old Testament truth but also a New Testament truth. Paul wrote,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. (Rom. 13:1-2)

The Bible is clear when it proclaims just Who it is that not only rules, but controls the matters of men upon this terrestrial ball. Jehovah rules!

God's Ultimate Plan

At the council in Jerusalem, James acknowledged that the Gentiles' inclusion into God's plan was prophesied and then he quoted from Amos 9. After that, he said, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). When writing concerning the Lord's church, which is Christ's kingdom, Paul wrote concerning this great mystery, which has now been revealed unto men. He wrote,

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:9-11)

This mystery of which Paul wrote is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of the Gospel proclaims, "There is good news." Jesus reigns as King and we can be saved in His kingdom. It also includes the fact that we are saved for a purpose. It was God's good pleasure (cf. Eph. 1:5; Eph. 1:9; Eph. 1:11) to bring men into His kingdom so they could be "to the praise of His glory" (cf. Eph. 1:6; Eph. 1:12; Eph. 1:14). As one studies God's Word, he will recognize that from the very beginning of God's revelation to man, it has a central theme or purpose in mind. The plan of God is slowly revealed in the pages of Holy Writ until we get to the New Testament where we see not only the plan, but also the result of the plan in all its splendid glory. Simply stated, God

was making a most glorious kingdom. In the construction of this kingdom, our great God “abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Eph. 1:8). As we learn of this plan through the pages of the Old Testament, we are keenly aware of the fact that it included God’s activity among the nations. Not only was God active among the nations of men, but He would also create a nation to accommodate His “eternal purpose.”

God Built A Nation

When the descendants of Abraham departed Egypt, conservative estimates claim there were over one million people and perhaps up to two million. If you are going to make a nation, you need a populace. The first thing they did by God’s guidance was go to Mount Sinai. They camped there for nearly one full year. It is there that they received the Law of Moses, God’s Law. If you are going to have a nation, you need a law. After the giving of the Law, they set out toward Canaan Land or the Promised Land. Though the journey took some forty years because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19), Joshua did finally lead them to conquest after the forty years. If you are going to have a nation, you need real estate. So Jehovah raised up Israel as His people, His nation, yeah, His bride. She was blessed with all she needed and much, much more. When she was faithful to the commands of Jehovah, her enemies trembled before her. When she was unfaithful to the commands of Jehovah, her enemies gained victories over her. In the halls of history, from an earthly vantage point, it looked as if men were controlling the events and the stronger ones were gaining the advantage by their might and the weaker ones were falling because they did not have the military advantage the enemy had. The matters would have been viewed much like men of the world view the political

maneuvering today. They live and operate as if there is no God in Heaven and as if they will not be held accountable in that great Day of Judgment.

The Word of God, however, teaches differently. When we turn our attention to the Bible and consider the events from Heaven's standpoint, we learn to see the matters behind the veil. We find a grand illustration of this very point in 2 Kings 6. The king of Syria warred against Israel. However, whenever he enacted his plans, they were foiled each time as the prophet warned the king of Israel concerning those plans. We would add here the prophet's ability to give warning was not achieved from within himself. Rather it was God in Heaven Who gave him the information. Finally, having been told "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber" (2 Kin. 6:12), he sent orders to find Elisha and the king would send and take him. When the king of Syria heard that the prophet was in Dothan, he sent "horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about" (2 Kin. 6:14). When Elisha's servant was raised early, he beheld the host with horses and chariots surrounding the city. Being fearful he asked the prophet, "How shall we do?" (2 Kin. 6:15). That which follows in the context is thrilling indeed. Elisha responded:

Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (2 Kin. 6:16-17)

Elisha's prayer pulled the curtain back and allowed the servant to see things from Heaven's perspective and not just men's. When we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7), we are able to view things from heaven's perspective and promises made by God are solidified in our minds and thus can affect our actions.

God Rules In The Kingdoms Of Men

It is because of the above truths that we are confident that our God is in control of matters here in this world. The nations are accountable to the God in heaven and the wise leaders rule with that realization.

Unfortunately, men have far too often failed to recognize this Divine truth. In a most powerful Messianic Psalm, we find the result of men thinking they can rise up and overthrow the great God in Heaven. In Psalm 2:1-3 we read of the foolishness of the rulers of this world.

Do the heathen rage, and the people
imagine a vain thing? The kings of the
earth set themselves, and the rulers take
counsel together, against the LORD, and
against his anointed, saying, Let us break
their bands asunder, and cast away their
cords from us.

Sadly, this attitude describes more of those that are in positions of power today than not. Men today, along with their rulers, live as if there is no God in heaven and as if there will never be a day of accounting. Such attitudes direct not only their personal lives, but also their decisions when it comes to ruling over the men of the world. Men fail to understand the true reality. The Psalmist tells us exactly how God responds

to such foolishness as that which is stated above. We read, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure” (Psa. 2:4-5).

There are a number of passages in the Psalms that declare divine truth on this subject.

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten: the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever. Arise, O LORD; let not man prevail: let the heathen be judged in thy sight. Put them in fear, O LORD: **that the nations may know themselves to be but men.** Selah. (Psa. 9:17-20; emphasis DW)

Again we read, “For the kingdom is the LORD’s: And he is the governor among the nations” (Psa. 22:28). Psalm 66:7 reads, “He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah.” Though we could put forth many other passages, we will allow these to suffice. These will do well to help us to establish the foundation for the grand proclamation of this chapter: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psa. 33:12).

Psalm 33: God—Creator, Ruler, And Redeemer

Psalm 33 powerfully proclaims the divine truths concerning the different roles God fills when it comes to His creation. He is the Creator, the Redeemer of man who was created in His image, and He is the Ruler, which speaks directly to the direction of our study. Psalm 33:10-17 is germane here.

The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength.

As we casually consider this passage, we recognize that not only does God rule in the kingdoms, but He also does so with a marvelous consistency. That consistency is seen in the fact that, in the end, righteousness is rewarded and unrighteousness will come face-to-face with God's full wrath. Men do not always recognize this fact. The wicked who fail to acknowledge God altogether are certainly in this group, but it is also the case that even God's people fail to recognize the consistency of His dealings with men.

Habakkuk, The Prophet

In the opening chapter of his prophecy, he questions Jehovah. His first question centered on the wickedness in Judah and just how long God would tolerate such. Before God

revealed His plan that He was going to use the Chaldeans to punish His people, He let Habakkuk know that he was not going to believe it even when God told him what He was going to do concerning that wickedness. That was absolutely right. Habakkuk responded,

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold
evil, and canst not look on iniquity:
wherefore lookest thou upon them
that deal treacherously, and holdest thy
tongue when the wicked devoureth the
man that is more righteous than he?
(Hab. 1:13)

Habakkuk is setting before Jehovah a very serious charge. Though Habakkuk stated a valid truth, he failed to recognize the full picture. So he accused the Great Sovereign of inconsistency in dealing with His creation. Fortunately, the beginning of the second chapter reveals to us His attitude and motive are pure and sincere. Ultimately, the book closes with a psalm which acknowledged the majesty and power of the One Who rules in the kingdoms of men.

Our Heavenly Father not only exercises His right to rule, but He has revealed to men what it takes to please Him. He has also expressed exactly what His response will be to both the obedience and disobedience of the nations of this world. Blessings and curses are Jehovah's reaction. Thus with great resolve, the Psalmist can proclaim, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Psa. 33:12).

Righteousness Exalts A Nation

Solomon wrote, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Pro. 14:34). The blessings of

God upon a nation are predicated by the fact that that nation has recognized the import for justice in its dealings. Israel was told:

Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live:
and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall
be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the
evil, and love the good, and establish
judgment in the gate: it may be that the
LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto
the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5:14-15)

There is a standard of right and wrong and the rulers of the world are obligated by their Creator to follow that standard. One needs simply to begin reading the book of Amos to see that there is none left out as far as the rebukes are concerned. Even though the main thrust of Amos' burdens were addressed to Israel, we recognize that the Gentile nations are not ignored, nor is Judah. It is adherence to the standard of righteousness that exalts a nation and brings the blessings of God. This conduct of our God should be no surprise to us if we consider the true nature of the King of kings. Zechariah prophesied of Christ in chapter nine of the book that bears his name. We have no question that Zechariah wrote of Jesus, for the writers of the Gospel accounts quote the passage and apply it to Him. The passage in consideration is Zechariah 9:9 where we read,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold,
thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and
having salvation; lowly, and riding upon
an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

It is said that He is just. Our King is a righteous King who will look down with favor upon those that are righteous. It is in this way that a nation claims the Lord to be their God. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord!

In Psalm 15, David wrote of the character essential to stand in the presence of the Lord. Consider verse 2 where David explains who will be able to stand in the presence of God. “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psa. 15:2).

Sin Is A Reproach To Any People

On the other hand, those who continue in sin will be a reproach before the Sovereign Creator who has promised to curse those that fail to follow after His precepts. Jeremiah described well the position men occupy when they sin. “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God” (Jer. 3:25). Isaiah revealed to us that Jehovah chooses to close His ears because of the transgressions of men. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Those who ignore the precepts of God to continue in their transgressions do it to their own detriment and put themselves in a position where it is impossible to claim the Lord as their God. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; but woe to the nation that closes its eyes and hears to the will of Jehovah.

Lessons To Be Learned Today

The people of the world and their rulers can take a number of lessons from this study. First, we must understand that even though it may appear things are moving along in

this world based on the whims of men and their posturing, it is truly God that is in control of the affairs of men. If God chooses a certain man to be in power, He will put him in that position. If He chooses for a nation to rise up and overshadow or even overthrow another nation, it is His prerogative, and He has the power to bring it about. Biblical history is filled with examples of nations rising and falling, and predictive prophecy proved it was the handiwork of God. Though we, in many ways, as Job was, are unaware of the activities going on behind the curtain of our view, when it comes to the affairs of men and the nations of this earth, we dare not conclude that God is not active. He still rules in the kingdoms of men.

For our next lessons to be learned, we will take a moment to turn our attention to the United States of America. At times in the history of our nation, she has been referenced as a “Christian” nation. Though this may bring comfort to some, we would say that biblically, America has never been a Christian nation. In fact, no nation of this world ever has been nor ever will be. The **only** Christian nation is the church of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). With that understood, we would be quick to say that at one time in the history of our nation, she was more closely tied to the precepts of the Word of God than she is today. That was a time when “one nation, under God” more aptly described the citizens of this great nation. Those things that are being promoted and “shoved in our faces today” as normal were looked down upon. Adultery caused by unscriptural divorces, all types of sexual perversion, drunkenness, narcissistic bravado, murder of the babies, the decay of the family and on and on were considered to be taboo by most of her citizens. At that time, America was **the** power to be reckoned with in the world. She was the champion for “liberty and justice for all.” It seemed apparent that God was

blessing America. Truly it could have been said in such a case—“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” It was a great lesson that all should have seen. However, at the time of the writing of this chapter, that can no longer be said. Not only are the perversions as defined by God’s Word tolerated, but they are touted as normal and right and so legislated as to bring the faithful child of God into a position of conflict with the government and the laws of the land. The attitude and demeanor of the rulers of the land are no less bold than those described in Psalm 2 who proclaimed concerning the Great God in Heaven, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa. 2:3). In light of Psalm 14:1, we would say fools walk the corridors of our nation’s capital. Sadly, it appears it is going to get much worse before it gets any better. It breaks the heart of a child of God to see our leaders trying to legislate God out of existence. With such a definite direction locked in, the United States of America is destined to fall. No nation has ever remained who rose up in such strong and hateful rebellion against God—**none, not one!** However, the child of God should not fret, for we have never been promised that the United States of America would be in existence when the Lord returned. And just as our first century brethren flourished under the despotic rule of Rome, so can we.

Another sad lesson would center on America again, in the context of the Islamic threat the world is facing. If one were to read a true, unaltered account of the history behind Islam, he would find it to be a religion of violence. Evangelism is by force, and a failure to convert means death. It is a very real threat for the world and the threat is very real for our nation also. The sad truth is that America is ill equipped to oppose such a hellish force. She has abandoned God and His truth. She has joined hands with the devil, endorsing every kind of

vile behavior and conduct. There is no way she can count on God to assist her without her repenting and turning back to His guidance and light. Jeremiah's message to Judah was just that. Only repentance and a national turning back to God could have thwarted the efforts of the Chaldeans. However, because she did not repent, Nebuchadnezzar became the "servant" of God (Jer. 25:9) and he rose up against the descendants of Abraham. It is very possible that those rising up against the "American Way," both without and within, are there by the will of God. The will of the Lord may be that the United States of America go the way of all the other nations that stood opposed to the Sovereign God in Heaven. The words of Jeremiah echo ominously through the years, even to our ears today.

Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. (Jer. 25:9-10)

It is a gloomy picture indeed. I would that each political figure in our nation would seriously consider the truths that you and I know to be valid and certain.

Conclusion

In closing, we would speak to those of the greatest kingdom the world has known and ever will know. That, of course, is the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. King Jesus has gained the victory and He reigns. No man nor even demon in hell that can change that fact. Just as Daniel prophesied, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44), it is true today. That kingdom came into reality in Acts 2 in the first century. She continues to this very moment and will forever. May she ever be loyal to her King and may we all bow down to the Sovereign of the world as we continue to study our Bibles more and more.

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The Battle Of Ai

Dan Manuel



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The battle of Ai is a tremendous lesson to help us view some things we need to remember when we are facing difficulties in our lives. This story of defeat that in reality transcended into a victory for God's people is one that we all should recall from time to time. Joshua and the children of Israel fell at Ai because they failed to remember a number of things that could have propelled them to victory following their conquest of Jericho.

The first thing we need to remember in those dark days is God's plan for us. When you are facing a defeat it can be hard to acknowledge and believe that God really has an underlying plan. However, we should constantly be

reminded of the words of King David, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in His way” (KJV, Psa. 37:23).

This lesson is born out in the story of Israel’s defeat at Ai. The words of God are recorded for us in Joshua 6:18: “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.” The charge of Joshua after the death of Moses was to pursue the Lord’s direction and lead His people into the wonderful land of promise. Many in today’s world refuse to heed the admonition to seek the counsel of the Almighty God of Heaven. The Lord God had given the land to them, but they had to take it. Such is the case with our salvation and the hope of heaven. We must understand that God wants to give us a home in Heaven. The words of Jesus remind us of His desire for us.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, LORD, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:1-6)

The tremendous challenge for Israel at first was the mighty walled city of Jericho. God showed His power and delivered the city into their hands. The Father in Heaven, however, warned the people that all of the spoils of this first victorious conquest belonged to Him. The word *Ai* means “a heap of ruins.” The first mention of this city is found in Genesis, when we are told that Abraham pitched his tent “between Bethel and Hai.” Following the battle at Jericho, one man out of the entire nation of Israel sinned against God. His name was Achan (his name means “troublesome” in Hebrew). Achan had taken a number of things and hidden them under his tent without the rest of Israel knowing it. Now here was another land to defeat, and it was small compared to Jericho; it was called Ai. Joshua sent spies to look at the city and they brought back the following report, “Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few” (Jos. 7:3). The result of the first battle with Ai is astounding. Joshua 7:5 records, “And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.” Some 36 warriors were killed and they retreated like cowards. What caused the death of these men? Joshua rent his clothes and cried out to God with the similar question. God’s answer was that there was sin in the camp; that was why they lost the battle. As a result of the defeat, all of the tribes and families were searched to see who was at fault, and the man Achan was found to be the guilty party. I wonder what the average soldier on the battle line was thinking. They knew that a few days before, they had faced Ai and been thoroughly defeated and 36 had died. Now they were going back to the city that had defeated them. This

was the first time they had been defeated in Canaan Land. I want to encourage you, no matter how bad things look to us, God has a plan.

In Jeremiah, God promised a time of difficulty—70 years of exile. It was about that time of defeat that the Lord said, “I know the plans I have for you” (ESV, Jer. 29:11). He went on to say: “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (ESV, Jer. 29:11-12).

Joshua placed judgment on Achan because of his sin, and the end result was the death of Achan.

And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. (Jos. 7:24-25)

What Achan did resulted in the death of 36 men, plus the children and his animals who died with him. As God’s servants today, one thing we need to recall is that as Christians, we are all part of God’s family, the church. When a child of God sins, the entire family is affected. Our sin can and will affect our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are told by the Apostle Paul in his writing to the church at Corinth,

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our LORD Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the LORD Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. (1 Cor. 5:1-10)

The church, like Israel, should maintain their purity and holiness before God. The words of the hymn *Purer In Heart, O God* must be more than words of a hymn we sing; they must be a way of life.

Other factors may have caused the children and 36 men to die at Ai as well. Those children living in the tent with their father Achan may have been aware of his sin and even condoned it. The soldiers were overconfident and filled with pride assuming they could conquer the city with only three thousand men in their fight against an entire city. They did not seek God on their decision to attack Ai. They assumed that God would honor their intentions, and they moved forward without His assurance. If they had sought God and called upon Him, He would have made them aware of the sin before the tremendous defeat. We must always seek the counsel of God before we make or act on a decision. James said, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jam. 1:5). We must also remember that sin—when tolerated by God’s people—will always result in defeat of not only the perpetrator of such sin, but others as well. The bottom line is, if there is sin in the camp, it will affect the entire camp. God’s admonition to us is to cleanse and purify ourselves before our Lord.

The second thing we need to remember is that God has a purpose. Sometimes it is difficult for us to connect with God’s purpose for those of us here below. We must seek the counsel of God before we make decisions in our lives. All too often, we fail at our initiatives simply because we are not acting upon the purposes of God. In the second battle regarding Ai, the retreat was not a mistake; it was the plan, and it had a purpose. It drew the defenders out of the city where they could be totally confused and defeated. I can

hear some skeptics say as they are running away, I hope this works! One thing we must remind ourselves of each day is that God's purposes are higher than ours. The prophet Isaiah recorded the words of God, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). The prophet also said,

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found,
call ye upon him while he is near: Let
the wicked forsake his way, and the
unrighteous man his thoughts: and
let him return unto the LORD, and he
will have mercy upon him; and to our
God, for he will abundantly pardon.
(Isa. 55:6-7)

We must learn to call upon God. Many of the pitfalls in life could be avoided if we genuinely determined the purpose of God concerning our lives. Many have failed to ask God regarding His purpose and thus they are destined to fail. As you look back over your life, you can see how what seemed to be in keeping with the will of God ultimately met with defeat. Sometimes we choose to go our way instead of His, but He is always waiting for us to be faithful again. God uses the difficult times in life's road to draw us closer to Him. He has a way of driving us to our knees to make us depend upon Him. If you cannot understand why things have happened the way they have, remember that God sees and understands things that you do not.

The third thing we must recall about Israel's defeat at Ai is that we should remember to pray. We often fail to communicate with God through the process we call

prayer. Prayer is a blessing not given to all people. Prayer is only available to God's children, Christians. Even a pagan mentioned in the book of John recognized that an unrepentant non-believer cannot pray acceptably to God. He said, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (John 9:31). From numerous other passages in the Holy Scriptures, we can understand that He wants us to become His children, thereby opening up the communication lines to heaven. Jesus taught, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Prayer has kept many of us from defeat. At times, we must pray to God for strength to face the challenges that come before us. Had Joshua and Israel sought God for His help in determining how they should conquer Ai and what might have happened prior to their defeat, the complexion of things might have changed dramatically. Joshua was a God-fearing man, but on this occasion, he did not seek God's throne for all the answers regarding the Amorites and how they could take the city of Ai.

We see the misfortune of many Christians today who neglect to pray. The Apostle Paul challenged the church in Thessalonica with these words, "Pray without ceasing" (1 The. 5:17). The blessings of God come through prayer. We will never be victorious without God's help, but with His help we can experience many victories. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church many years ago with these words: "I can do all things through Christ which is my strength" (Phi. 4:13). I bring to your remembrance the timely words of Paul the Apostle in his letter to the Romans, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Our efforts are always in vain if we seek victory without God's help.

The fourth thing that should be remembered is the penalty for sin. Achan knew that there was a penalty for departure from God. We come to the conclusion that Achan took of the accursed things and placed them in his tent because of either rebellion, selfishness, or—like many—thinking he could hide his sin. When Israel went up against Ai the second time, the Lord told them that they would do to Ai what they did to Jericho, except for the fact that in Ai, they were to take all the spoils for themselves! If Achan would have waited just a few more days, then he could have had all the riches that he could have imagined. Instead, he ran ahead of God and grabbed for himself that which was forbidden by God and as a result, Achan paid the ultimate price.

One thing Achan learned too late was that the penalty for sin is death. We read in the Romans letter, “The wages of sins is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our LORD” (Rom. 6:23). We need to be reminded often of the consequences of sin and its punishment. God does not tolerate sin in any fashion and it will surely be dealt with according to God’s Word. In Ezekiel’s prophecy we read, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze. 18:4). Israel had already learned what happened when they did things the Lord’s way. When you fight the battle by following His plan, you cannot fail. They had also learned what happened when they refused to do it God’s way. They learned that failure awaits that person who goes against the will of the LORD.

Achan in times past had seen the punishment of the wicked and those given to sin and the vindication of the righteous. Had he recalled what had happened at Jericho a short time earlier, he would have been reminded that sin does not pay. The story of Achan is a sad one indeed. It was not only sad for Achan and his family, but for all of Israel. This story was published throughout the camp and for generations that

were yet to be born. Achan's name is synonymous with sin and the heartache it causes to self and others. The legacy of Achan could easily be ours as well. When we sin before God and fail to repent of our transgressions, we surely sever the relationship with God. The prophet Isaiah again said,

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened,
that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy,
that it cannot hear: But your iniquities
have separated between you and your
God, and your sins have hid his face from
you, that he will not hear. (Isa. 59:1-2)

Sin always divides us from our Lord in heaven and that sin brings grief and tremendous sorrow into our lives. We, like Achan, struggle with temptation. May we refuse to give in to Satan and his diabolical schemes to draw us away from our convictions. May we always do what is right in the sight of God. Do not succumb to temptation and lose your soul in hell. That would be a price too high for anyone.

The fifth thing we need to remember is that God made a promise. In the very first verse of the text, God told Joshua not to be discouraged, but to go up and attack Ai, for I have delivered them into your hands (Jos. 8:1). Notice that God did not say, "I will deliver." He said, "I have delivered." One of the great examples of God's purpose is found in John 11. Our Lord said to Martha as Lazarus had died and was wrapped in the shroud of death and in his grave, "Your brother will rise again" (NKJV, John 11:23). Jesus promised his disciples on at least three different occasions that He must die and that on the third day He would rise again. Have you ever considered all the promises that God has made? Many promises in His Word tell us that if we believe in our hearts, repent of our sins,

and then submit to New Testament baptism, God will forgive our sins. That is a tremendous promise. Christ has promised to make our home in heaven ready for us. Jesus said to Martha as Lazarus lay cold in the grave, “Your brother will rise again.” Jesus promised His disciples on at least three different occasions that although He must die that on the third day, He would rise again. What promise has He made to you? Let us consider some of them from His Word, not the least of which is, that if you put your trust in what He did on the cross and obey the gospel, you can have His gift of eternal life. He has made numerous other promises also. I want us to consider one that can bring great comfort when your world seems to be falling apart. That promise is recorded in Joshua 1:5: “I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” If you walk, as the Psalmist says “through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psa. 23:4), you need fear no evil for He is with you, regardless of what you face or how impossible it seems. When you cannot reach out and touch Him or see Him, no matter how hard you try, you need to remember that His promise to be with you is unfulfilling. We need to let that promise become an anchor that helps strengthen our faith in the Lord. A similar promise is recorded in the book of Hebrews. “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). The thing that holds me to my Lord is the promises He has made to me through the Bible. Prior to His ascension back to be with the Father in heaven, Christ spoke these words,

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare

a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, LORD, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:1-6)

Someday those words will become a reality for all the sainted dead. My hope transcends the grave. God's servant said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Hope is the great gift of God that He has given to all who honor Him as Lord. Hope for a victory as Ai was lost initially because of Achan's sin. Only until there is a return to God can one find lasting hope that is real. May God help us to hold on to the hope that He has given.

Special Forces

Preachers: The Front Lines

Gary Hampton



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The world is at war. It is a battle for the souls of mankind. The evidence is in every aspect of our society, from redefining the family so as to destroy its stabilizing ability to elevating sinful activities while labeling speaking out against such as hate speech. God's preachers must be on the front lines of this battle proclaiming God's righteousness and exposing the works of darkness.

It is not surprising, then, to see the apostle describe himself and other men as soldiers in service to Christ the King. He told the brethren at Philippi, "Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need" (NKJV, Phi. 2:25). Notice that Paul viewed Epaphroditus as a man who had fought side by side with him in defense of the gospel. He used the same word in Philemon 2, where he wrote, "To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house." It is likely that both Epaphroditus and Archippus

were proclaimers of good news, since the apostle in part defended paying gospel preachers by asking, “Who ever goes to war at his own expense?” (1 Cor. 9:7).

“A Good Soldier Of Jesus Christ”

Paul instructed Timothy, saying, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3-4). The apostle wanted his son in the faith to be ready to suffer persecution, self-denial and the onslaught of the enemy like a soldier on active duty. The words “engaged in warfare” mean “to make a military expedition, to do military duty, to be on active service, to be engaged in warfare” (Wuest II:129).

The words “entangles himself” “envisages a soldier’s weapons entrammelled in his cloak. The main point is therefore the renunciation of everything which hinders the real purpose of the soldier of Christ. There is nothing intrinsically wrong, in other words, about the *affairs of this life* until they entangle. Then they must be resolutely cast aside.” Each soldier had a goal to please the one who had asked him to join his assembly of troops. “This involves for the soldier a sinking of his own desires in a total effort to please his chief. No more admirable figure of speech could be found to illustrate the extent of Christ’s claims upon His ministers” (Guthrie 140-141).

This matches Paul’s description of his own service, when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me” (Gal. 2:20). “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,

by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Every Christian soldier has been raised with Christ and must “seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1-3).

The Struggle With The “Rulers Of Darkness”

Paul, as one of those preaching soldiers, told the saints in Ephesus,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:10-12)

“Be strong” means “to make strong, to endue with strength.’ The idea is ‘to clothe one’s self with strength as one puts on a garment.’ Here the verb is in the passive voice, ‘be continually strengthened” (Wuest I:40). The apostle’s use of the passive makes it clear that Christians do not actively strengthen themselves but receive strength from the Lord. The true strength of the Christian comes only from the Lord’s great might (Phi. 4:13).

Winning the battle will require each Christian soldier to put on the Lord’s armor, since our enemy is the Devil. The word for “devil” is *diabolos*, the chief of the demons who is a

slandorous accuser. He is the leader of the enemy forces and seeks out any area of weakness to exploit (1 Pet. 5:8). That is why we need God's armor, not some of our own making. The Almighty knows exactly what we will need to defeat the enemy and win the victory. Jesus put the Devil to flight by answering each temptation with "It is written" (Mat. 4:1-11).

The apostle to the Gentiles saw God's children in hand-to-hand combat with the forces of evil. "Wrestle" likely describes "two soldiers who in the midst of battle faced off one against the other for a very personal hand-to-hand combat" (Summers 141). This battle involves individual Christians in a struggle for their spiritual lives. The seriousness of the conflict should be seen in the nature of the opponent. Christians are fighting the Devil and his whole organization of darkness. Wickedness is organized in its fight to overthrow Christ's army. The "heavenly places" would describe things beyond the ordinary or natural battlegrounds.

Satan has already challenged God and lost. He has been cast down from heaven, but will now fight in every other place, including the church (2 Pet. 2:4; Acts 20:29-31). It is vital that preachers remind Christians of the very personal nature of this battle. The Devil is trying to capture anyone he can, including each Christian (2 Tim. 2:23-26; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 Pet. 2:17-22).

The Christian's Armor

Paul, as a fighter on the front lines, urged Christians to stand their ground because the forces of evil were going to attack (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Cor. 16:13). He wrote, "Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13). The "evil day" is a day of crises when the fight is on. One must prepare for a battle before it comes, not during the attack.

The apostle to the Gentiles was likely chained to, or at least guarded by, a soldier as he wrote this epistle. One can imagine him carefully examining that soldier's armor as he wrote about the Christian's means of defense. Roman soldiers girded their loins with a belt to hold things in place and allow freer movement. Those in Christ's army use the truth, which is God's Word and will make us free, as that with which to gird our loins (Eph. 6:14; John 17:17; John 8:32). The breastplate protected the vital organs of the chest region. Righteousness is the Word of God, specifically His commandments (Psa. 119:172). The Roman soldiers wore hobnailed sandals to hold their ground in even the worst conditions. Christians hold their ground by putting on the gospel shoes (Eph. 6:15; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 1:16).

Each man carried on his left arm a large shield (*scutum*) that was curved to cover the body. It was made of wood edged with metal, and the handgrip on the inside was protected on the outside by a metal boss. The outside surface of the shield was covered with leather and embellished with metal decorations. (Williams 220-221)

Paul directs Christ's warriors, telling them, "above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Eph. 6:16).

When its outside leather covering was soaked in water, as it should have been before any battle, it protected the soldier from incendiary missiles—arrows or

spears tipped with fibrous material of some kind, impregnated with pitch, set alight, and discharged. (Williams 222)

Faith, which comes through hearing God's Word, is the shield used by the disciples of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

“The head was covered by a metal helmet, with a projecting plate at the back to protect the neck. The face was protected by cheek plates hinged at the top to the helmet” (Williams 220). Salvation, which serves as the Christian's helmet, is put on through a careful examination of Scripture, which foretold the coming of the Messiah (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The sword was used defensively to deflect the blows an opponent might direct his way. It was used offensively to pierce the enemy. God's Spirit-delivered Word is the Christian's sword (Heb. 4:12). Jesus knew its value and used it to turn aside Satan's assault in the wilderness (Mat. 4:1-11). Only through study can the Christian soldier learn how to properly handle this important weapon (Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:15).

The Prayer Supply Line

Christ's soldiers should enter the battle with armor in place, swords drawn, and soliciting the Father in prayer for personal support and support of the brethren, their fellow fighters (Eph. 6:18). “We will never be any stronger than our prayers. No congregation of the Lord's church will ever be mightier than the prayer lives of its people.” Prayer should be a constant in the life of every Christian warrior since it is the means of enlisting the help of the Almighty and requesting the supplies needed to continue the fight (Luke 18:1; 1 The. 5:17). “What the church needs—what the army of the living God needs—is more prayer warriors. They are soldiers claiming the blessing of God, claiming His strength,

and claiming divine resources against the adversary” (Lockhart 348).

Paul recognized the power of prayer and often requested the prayers of the saints as he went forth with the sword of the Spirit proclaiming the will of God (Eph. 6:19-20). He particularly felt the need for courage in preaching that he might fully proclaim God’s message (Col. 4:3-4). Preaching “the whole counsel of God” is the only means of freeing oneself from guilt regarding the blood of those who hear God’s messenger (Acts 20:26-27; Eze. 3:17-19).

Preachers Must Be Examples

Effective fighting on the front lines begins with living an exemplary life. “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). “In that ancient environment, a man was considered a ‘youth’ until the age of forty” (Jackson 124). The words of an evangelist are important both from the pulpit and in daily communication with others. “How one talks with, and to, folks can be as important as what he says. Harsh, condescending, and insulting words do not carry the day, though on occasion, ‘sharpness’ may be justified (Tit. 1:13; cf. Mat. 23)” (Jackson 125).

Living a good life is also important, since what one says can be drowned out by what one does. An intellectual commitment to the best interests of others, or agape love, opens the doors of people’s hearts (1 John 4:7-11). “In faith” “means the demonstration of full trust and confidence in God and Christ and their promises, with the concept of faithfulness to all the duties and services of a Christian” (Roberts 51). “Purity” “is always used with a moral sense. It is not limited to sins of the flesh, but covers purity in motive as well as in acts” (Wuest II:74).

Timothy would find that example easier to set if he went on to follow Paul's advice in verse 13, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13). The younger evangelist was encouraged to pay close attention to the things being read, especially in assemblies of the saints. Setting aside a time to hear God speak by reading through His Word again and again will also be a source of strength. God's minister will then use those inspired Words to encourage the brethren to do the things they had heard from inspired penmen. Achieving that end would, of course, require educating the listeners as to the meaning of the things which had been read, challenging them to join him in meditating on the law of the Lord (Psa. 1:2).

Preachers must avoid the love of money and the evil that follows its pursuit, as Paul warned Timothy.

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim. 6:11-12)

Paul told Timothy to "fight," from *agonizou*, as a means of charging him

to keep himself in the fray for truth. The term suggests an intense struggle. It is used in connection with preaching (Col. 1:28-29; 3:1; Jude 3), with prayer (Col.

4:12), and of Jesus' emotional struggle in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:44). (Jackson 176)

The word can have reference to the struggles of the Olympic games or of warfare. "In view of Timothy's battle with the false teachers at Ephesus, the military sense might be more appropriate than the athletic contest" (Jackson 176). The apostle had already used that imagery, as Jackson notes. "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:18).

Preachers Must Enlist And Encourage Others

Preachers will only be effective on the front lines of the battle against Satan if they enlist and encourage others in the fight.

Here is the thrilling way that Paul describes his young minister-brother, Timothy: 'O man of God!' (1 Tim. 6:11)...He sets the tone. He is the man who, with his sharp knowledge of the Word, sets the atmosphere, and ever moves the church on to accept its heaven-sent mission. (Layton 48)

God's ministers must be vitally concerned with the church, feeling with each in his struggle for the Lord. Paul gave a list of things he had endured as a minister of Christ, concluding with "besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2 Cor. 11:28-29).

That attitude gave more weight to his charge to the Ephesian elders to pay close attention to the wellbeing of their own souls and those of the flock over which they watched. “Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). “It is indeed a sad indictment that Paul issued against many of the preachers of his day when he declared they minded ‘their own, not the things of Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 2:21)” (Layton 49).

Each Good News proclaimer must exhibit a sense of urgency in reaching out to the lost. Christians in Caesarea who had pled with Paul not to go to Jerusalem heard a powerful answer. “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). He told the brethren in Rome,

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh. (Rom. 9:1-3)

He also wrote, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved” (Rom. 10:1).

A Strategy That Works

Jesus’ strategy for getting the disciples to acknowledge who He was began with a question that pointed to the confusion of the multitudes. “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Their answers—John the Baptist, Elijah,

or one of the prophets—clearly demonstrate that the people knew He was a spokesman from God, but not which one. The Lord then asked a follow-up question, “But who do you say that I am?” That question, immediately following the other, opened the door for Peter to declare that He was God’s greatest spokesman, His Son (Mat. 16:13-20).

The Lord used the disciples’ question to open another door for teaching. They asked, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” His answer taught them the danger of worldly desire for power over others and the value of receiving His teachings with childlike simplicity (Mat. 18:1-5). The Master taught the rich, young ruler by taking full advantage of his question, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” The Savior’s answer included instruction on the nature of God, which He possessed, and the menace found in loving anything more than God (Mark 10:17-22).

The Master gave a concise, but marvelously instructive response to Pilate’s question,

‘What have You done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate understood enough to ask a follow-up question, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’

One can only wonder what He might have taught the governor if he had waited to hear the answer to, what is truth? (John 18:35-38).

The strategy for winning souls for Christ is evident in these and other exchanges between the Lord and those seeking, or not, to learn from Him. Today's preacher must eagerly listen for the open door found in other's questions, like the Lord and his followers did (Acts 4:7-12; Acts 8:31; Acts 16:30). He must also learn to ask the kind of questions that gives his hearer the opportunity to open the door (Acts 8:30; Acts 10:29). It is important for him to stay on the alert for the implied question and the opportunity it presents, like Paul did when Festus effectively said, "Are you crazy?" (Acts 26:24-28).

Preachers Must Help People Hear God Speak

Our loving God sent his Son to die for us. That explains why He has "given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). Preachers should instruct people just like Paul did Timothy. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). The God-breathed Word can help even those in childhood grow in the knowledge of the faith in Christ which leads toward salvation (2 Tim. 3:15-17). It can also direct each soul toward every good work, so evangelists should set the goal of helping God's people increase in learning (Pro. 1:5; Pro. 9:9). The rich man learned the importance of knowing and obeying God's will. He thought his brothers, who had ignored Moses and the prophets, would listen to one who returned from the dead. Abraham said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). It

is sad to note that the Jewish leaders proved the truthfulness of this following our Lord's resurrection (Mat. 28:11-15).

God's Word teaches us to reverence Him (Deu. 4:10; Psa. 34:11). Israel's kings were to make a copy of the law, read it, and learn to fear. The people were to participate in reading the law every seven years so they and their children could learn to fear the Lord and keep his commandments (Deu. 14:22-23; Deu. 17:14-20; Deu. 31:9-13). Proper reverence for God will result in the Lord protecting us from our enemies (Psa. 27:11).

The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
Blessed is the nation whose God is the
Lord, And the people whom He has
chosen as His own inheritance. (Psa.
33:11-12)

The singer wanted the Lord to teach him his path (Psa. 25:3-4).

God's Word teaches us what pleases Him and produces joy (Col. 1:9-11). Paul said we cannot please men and be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:10; Rom. 8:8). Pleasing God requires faith which only comes through hearing God's Word (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17). The singer of Israel praised God's Word through the alphabet in Psalm 119. He desired to learn God's will (Psa. 119:7; Psa. 119:12; Psa. 119:26; Psa. 119:33; Psa. 119:64; Psa. 119:71; Psa. 119:108). Moses was to teach Israel statutes and judgments (Deu. 4:14). Ezra was a great leader of the returning captives because he "had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Preach The Word

Our age is filled with the love of sin and the desire to have preachers proclaim God's approval for those sinful acts. Paul anticipated the coming of a similar time and wrote,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Roberts saw "they" as referring to some in the church.

These people will heap up or multiply teachers according to their own lust or desires. This means that they will want teachers who tickle their fancies; they will demand teachers who will approve or wink at their doing things that are immoral or wrong (cf. Isa. 30:9-10). (96)

There is "a constant temptation for the preacher to cater to human wants, to find out which way the wind is blowing, and to be non-controversial in the matter of sermon selection" (Layton 57).

Paul's remedy to the coming desire for teachers to pronounce God's blessings on sinful acts is seen in the two verses immediately preceding these.

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the

living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

The serious nature of Paul's charge to Timothy can be seen in his calling on the Father and Son as witnesses, with special emphasis on the fact that the Son would judge both the living and the dead.

The 'therefore' refers to the teaching of the preceding chapter on the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures and states the viewpoint from which the charge is made by the direct authority of the apostle. . . . Paul implies that the preacher's proper use of the inspired Word of God is something for which he shall give account in the judgment. (Roberts 94)

"The big, big need of humanity is to know Christ, to understand His will, to know forgiveness of sins, to know how to properly worship Him, and to know the identity and organization of the true church" (Layton 58). The New Testament is filled with examples of preachers who challenged the thinking of their audience, even to the point of endangering their own lives. Peter boldly told the Sanhedrin that salvation was only to be found under the authority of Jesus (Acts 4:5-21). All the apostles continued to preach and teach Jesus after being beaten (Acts 5:12-42). Stephen gave an overview of the rejection of God's spokesmen through the years and concluded by accusing the council of murdering

the Just One, which led to his being stoned (Acts 7:1-60). Paul and Barnabas rushed to stop the priests from the temple of Zeus from sacrificing and the people stoned Paul (Acts 14:8-20). Paul withstood Peter to the face (Gal. 2:11). Today's preacher must similarly challenge error on the front line in the battle with the forces of evil.

Conclusion

Effective fighters on the front lines of the war with the forces of evil will recognize there is a war going on and take note of his comrades in arms, fellow preachers. Preachers, like soldiers, must avoid becoming entangled in the affairs of this earthly life. It is important to know the enemy who will take him on in an intense one-on-one struggle. The proper armor and weaponry, which all comes from or is the Word of God, must be used if the battle is to be won. Constant communication with headquarters must be maintained through continual prayer.

The preacher who would stand with others in the fight must be sure to set the proper example for them to imitate (1 Cor. 11:1). He should demonstrate a well-defined knowledge of the Bible, keep the mission before the church, and show compassion for those struggling against the forces of Satan. God's preacher will always be on the lookout for questions that open the door, as well as being ready to ask the questions that will open a door to the souls of the lost. The minister/soldier ought to be well-versed in the Word of God and encourage others to become like him in that important quality. Finally, preachers must know that the only way to deflect and overcome the arguments of the Wicked One is by preaching the Word.

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Homosexuality

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My sincere thanks to the Southaven elders and preachers for the invitation to speak on this lectureship. It is very humbling for me to be afforded this privilege. The phrase *weapons of mass destruction* entered our vocabulary during the invasion of Iraq. However, these types of weapons have been around for a long time. A small number of people can use these kinds of weapons to harm many people. In the same way, there are weapons used by just a few people that can cause great harm to society. This is true with our subject under discussion. Over thirty years ago, I wrote an

article based upon a comment made by Guy N. Woods in the Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman College. He said, "Any ten years we fail to teach basic principles, we will suffer the consequences." One of the reasons we have problems with this topic and so many others is because we did not do enough teaching of God's Word on this subject. We also have the responsibility to use our influence as Christians to promote good morals (KJV, Mat. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 15:33).

The topic under discussion is a very touchy, controversial subject in our day. Many societies and cultures are being affected by this practice and its effects. In the discussion of this topic, it is not necessary to look at all of the research that has been conducted by sociologists, scientists, and social workers, although this is helpful and useful. It is only important what God thinks about it.

Even though there are those who argue against homosexuality without using the Bible, in this lesson, we will approach this topic stating we believe the Bible, the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible is our standard of authority for our lives (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22-25; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 The. 2:13-14; Rom. 1:16; Col. 3:17). It is important we understand and obey the Will of God (Rom. 6:17-18). If you do not believe the Bible, you will not enjoy nor appreciate this lesson. God created mankind with the freedom to choose. People sin because they choose to do so. God does not force people to sin and He does not force people to obey Him.

God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden, providing for their needs. He also gave them commands to follow (Gen. 2:15-17). Because of the transgression of God's law by Adam and Eve, sin entered into the world and people still sin today (Rom. 5:12).

In both the Old and New Testaments, God has commanded people to live holy lives. He discussed the

sins of nations the Israelites were not to follow but instead instructed them to be holy like Him (Lev. 18:24-19:2). The New Testament lists many sins from which we are to abstain (Mat. 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). We are to “put to death” our sinful lives so that we can “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” (Col. 3:1-17). Peter said:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:13-16)

If we want to go to heaven, we must obey His Will (Psa. 143:10; Mat. 7:21-23).

Over the past fifty years or so, segments of society have been promoting homosexuality as a normal practice. We are urged to accept lifestyles contrary to the teachings of the Bible. This kind of thinking is evident in movies, television, magazine, books, schools, business, etc. Political correctness is now the order of the day. Concerning this subject, political correctness says, People are born that way, or It is a sickness, like alcoholism. Solomon said, “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34).

A number of religious leaders defend these practices. Efforts are being made to reach children with this view

through a number of books, movies, and television. Some people say churches should not be talking about this subject because it is a political issue. However, this subject, like abortion, was a moral topic long before it ever became a political topic. What used to be wrong is now right, and what used to be right is now wrong. It brings to mind the words of Isaiah:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isa. 5:20-21)

It also brings to mind Judges 17:6, “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Does the Bible have anything to say about the subject of homosexuality? Is there anything in the Old Testament that mentions this subject? What about the New Testament? In this lesson, we will see teaching in both the Old and New Testaments concerning this practice. We will show that in the eyes of God, homosexuality is sin. If we do not repent of it and get out of it, we will be lost eternally.

The Bible Condemns This Practice

The first example of homosexuality mentioned in the Bible is the account of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. Many people say that this story is myth or fairy tale. They would like for people to believe no such city existed. This is not a fairy tale. The book of Genesis (and every other part of the Bible) is not a fairy tale. To deny the book of Genesis is

to deny the rest of the Bible. It would also deny the accuracy of the Bible.

After Abraham and his family returned from Egypt, the possessions of Abraham and Lot were too great to live in the same area. Their herdsmen were arguing. So they decided to separate. Lot chose the area which included the city of Sodom. The wickedness of the city is described in Genesis 13:13, “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”

God told Abraham He was going to destroy the city (Gen. 18:20-21). Abraham made an appeal for the city asking God to spare it if he could find just ten righteous people (Gen. 18:23-32). Because there were not ten righteous people found in the city, God sent two angels to Lot’s house to warn him of the coming destruction so that he could flee (Gen. 19:12). Note the action of the men of the city when these two angels visited Lot.

But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him. And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. (Gen. 19:4-7)

Note that both young and old men were involved in this sin. They wanted “to know” the men who came to Lot’s house; that is, they wanted to know them sexually. Lot calls

this wickedness. This was not just a sin of inhospitality or violence as some would like it to mean. The Bible records the result of this as well. The city was destroyed after Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were allowed to escape. We are also aware of what happened to Lot's wife when she violated God's command and looked back at the city. She was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26; Luke 17:32).

Some might say this is just an Old Testament story which has no application to people today, but the New Testament confirms it.

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. (Mat. 11:23-24)

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 7)

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot,

vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds). (2 Pet. 2:6-8)

The book of Judges also records an example of the same kind of activities we read about in Genesis chapter nineteen. In Judges 19:22-25, we read of people in Canaan wanting to “know” a priest who was visiting in town. In the end, they ravaged and killed the priest’s concubine. Note the common thread in Judges:

And it came to pass in those days, when **there was no king in Israel**, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine out of Bethlehem-judah. (Jud. 19:1; emphasis JG)

In those days **there was no king in Israel**, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Jud. 17:6; emphasis JG)

In those days **there was no king in Israel**: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Jud. 21:25; emphasis JG)

These passages show the lack of respect for authority that existed in the land.

Sodom and Gomorrah serve as the standard by which other sins are compared.

The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. (Isa. 3:9)

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isa. 13:19)

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. (Jer. 23:14)

Many more passages in the Old Testament use Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of ungodly living. If the sin of Sodom is so insignificant, why are there so many passages in both the Old Testament and New Testament that reference its sin and uses it as a comparison to so many other sins?

The Mosaic Law Condemns This Practice

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. Defile not ye your selves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you. (Lev. 18:22-24)

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. (Lev. 20:13)

There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God. (Deu. 23:17-18)

The word *dog* here is a synonym for sodomite or homosexual. “Dogs” will not be in heaven.

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie. (Rev. 22:14-15)

Israel’s faithfulness was partly determined by the king’s attitude toward the sodomites in the land.

And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they

had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. (1 Kin. 14:22-24)

And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, he [Jehoshophat] took out of the land. (1 Kin. 22:46)

And he [Josiah] brake down the houses of the sodomites, that were by the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the grove. (2 Kin. 23:7)

Israel Compared To Sodom And Gomorrah *Passages In The Old Testament*

Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. (Isa. 1:10)

The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. (Isa. 3:9)

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. (Jer. 23:14)

And thine elder sister is Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. (Eze. 16:46)

As I live, saith the LORD GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. (Eze. 16:48)

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. (Eze. 16:49)

When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them. (Eze. 16:53)

When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate. (Eze. 16:55)

For thy sister Sodom was not mentioned by thy mouth in the day of thy Pride. (Eze. 16:56)

I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. (Amos 4:11)

Passages In The New Testament

Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Mat. 10:15)

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Mark 6:11)

The New Testament Also Condemns Homosexuality

Many who want to justify the practice of homosexuality claim God only condemned this sin in the Old Testament. However, four significant New Testament passages are relevant to our study. Three of these four passages are found in the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul has suffered much criticism through the years with people questioning his motives and accusing him of just giving his opinions. However, note what Paul said in 1 Cor. 14:37: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the LORD.”

1 Cor. 6:9-11

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor **abusers of themselves with mankind**, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the LORD Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11; emphasis JG)

“Abusers of themselves with mankind” comes from the Greek phrase which means “males having sexual relations.” Paul makes it clear that those who practice this will not go to heaven.

Rom. 1:26-27

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: **for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly,** and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (emphasis JG)

Note the words Paul (by inspiration) used in this passage: **vile, against nature, unseemly, error.** These are not terms of approval. This passage is in the context of discussing the unrighteousness of the Gentiles. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

1 Timothy 1:8-10

But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for **them that defile themselves with mankind,** for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any

other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. (emphasis JG)

Please note verse ten—“**defile themselves with mankind.**” This is the same Greek phrase the Apostle Paul used in 1 Corinthians 6:9.

The fourth passage, found in Jude 7, refers back to the example of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Where are the people from these cities today? Those individuals are “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” All of these passages show us the way God views this practice. It is not approved, but condemned.

Can The Homosexual Be Saved?

Of course the answer to this question is yes. God loves all people and wants us all to be saved.

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)

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the Truth. (1 Tim. 2:4)

The LORD is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

How can the homosexual be saved? In the same way any other fornicator, idolater, adulterer, thief, or drunkard can be saved. Repentance is necessary. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Sins must be washed by the blood of Christ. “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the LORD” (Acts 22:16). Then, the practice must be stopped. This is the implication of repentance.

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the LORD Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)

Conclusion

Great pressure is placed upon the Christian to minimize sin in our society. It is not politically correct to take a stand against sin in our day and time. It was not easy for the Old Testament prophets to take a stand against sin. Nor was it easy for the Christians in the first century to preach the gospel to the heathen world. It will not be easy today, but we must obey God. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

There has been a steady digression of morals in society. First, it was abortion. Next, it was homosexuality. What will

be next? Already people are saying pedophilia and incest are acceptable lifestyles.

Jesus tells us God's Will for marriage.

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mat. 19:4-6)

He also tells us there is only one scriptural reason for divorce and remarriage (Mat. 19:9). Many people around the world do not have a scriptural right to be married and therefore in order to go to heaven, must follow Jesus's words in Matthew 19:12.

For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (Mat. 19:12)

The most important thing in the world is to go to heaven! By the way, all fornication is sin. Some think if you are not homosexual, then fornication is acceptable. If we want to

be pleasing to God, we must follow His teachings. May the Lord help us to teach His truths concerning marriage. May we continue to stand for the truth regardless of the pressures and persecutions that may come our way.

The Christian And Civil Government: His Role And Responsibility

B. J. Clarke



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If you want to start a vigorous debate, even among some of our brethren, bring up the subject in the above title, and the conflict will begin. As is often the case, one extreme begets another. Some argue that the Christian has no right whatsoever to advocate political candidates, vote for political candidates, picket for a political cause, or participate in anything else remotely associated with politics. On the other

hand, some preachers and members of the church have become so embroiled in the political arena that they seem to deem their political mission as superior in significance to their mission of seeking and saving the lost. These people have never met a political cause they did not like. They promote positions on political issues that are only remotely religious at best in their moral and ethical import.

Some have argued that civil government is the invention of rebellious men who did not want to live under the government of God. While it is true that man has often rebelled against the authority of God, and that some men have invented their own forms of government, this does not negate the truth that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (KJV, Rom. 13:1). In His infinite wisdom, God not only ordained the institutions of the home and the church—He also provided a system of government whereby we might live in an orderly society.

Be that as it may, rather than spending the bulk of our time debating the precise time of the origin and nature of civil government, our assignment is to address how the Christian ought to interact with the civil government under which he/she lives. After all, no matter what man believes about where civil government came from, civil government is here and the Christian needs to know how to interact with the powers that be.

Throughout both Testaments, we see a fascinating interaction between God and human government. For instance, God knew that His people would someday have a king, and thus He gave specific instructions to these kings as to how they were to rule the people (Gen. 17:6-14; Deu. 17:14-20). Many of the prophetic books reveal God’s message to the foreign governments of the day.

From a New Testament perspective, Paul's treatise in Romans 13 supplies more than enough evidence to show that government is not necessarily to be viewed as antagonistic toward God. According to the apostle Paul, to resist the authority of the government is to resist the ordinance of God (Rom. 13:2). In fact, the passage in Romans 13 actually depicts God and government working in concert together for the good of humanity. Paul even labels the government as "the minister of God to thee for good" (Rom. 13:4).

The Christian's Duty To Civil Government

Of course, a Christian is a member of the church of Jesus, the Christ (Acts 2:47; Rom. 16:16). His church is not a democracy—it is a monarchy, with Jesus Christ as its sole legislator and monarch. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Consequently, His subjects must **always** acquiesce to His will in order to be well pleasing in His sight. But what does the Bible teach about the relationship of a Christian to civil government? Consider the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and Peter on this matter.

Jesus And Civil Government

And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.
(Luke 23:1-2)

Actually, the multitude was guilty of leveling false accusations against what Jesus taught about human

government. The account of what Jesus actually said is recorded in Matthew 22:15-22.

A study of this passage reveals the following things:

1. The Pharisees were not truly interested in the things our Lord had to say. They merely desired to entrap Him.
2. The Pharisees did not realize that they were playing way out of their league. Jesus knew what was in their hearts (John 2:24-25) and He knew how to impale them on the horns of their own invented dilemma!
3. Jesus did not forbid people to give tribute to Caesar. Rather, He acknowledged that man had certain responsibilities to his government and certain responsibilities to his God. Even the Old Testament, under which Jesus lived, declared: "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king" (Pro. 24:21).

Jesus respected human government even though He was superior to it. When Jesus and the disciples came to Capernaum, certain tax-collectors came to Peter and said,

Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a

piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee. (Mat. 17:24-27)

From this passage we can see:

1. As King of the earth, Jesus had the authority to excuse Himself and His children from paying tribute.
2. Jesus did not argue with the authority of rulers to demand payment for taxes.
3. To set the right example, Jesus did obey the laws of human government. He did pay His taxes.

The Apostle Paul And Civil Government

The Jews were especially reluctant to subject themselves to the Roman government and those Jews who became Christians might be prone to fight against Rome and thereby rebel against her authority to govern their lives. However, Paul leaves no doubt as to the proper relationship between the Christian and civil government. A careful analysis of Romans 13:1-7 provides the following lessons:

1. Every soul is to be subject to the higher powers (v. 1).
2. The powers that be are ordained of God, i.e., God is the author of civil government (v. 1).
3. Therefore, to rebel against the authority of human government is to rebel against the authority of God Who gave the government its powers (v. 2).
4. To oppose the authority of human government is to invite eternal damnation to our souls! (v. 2).
5. We can be free from the fear of those in authority if we do what is right (v. 3).
6. God intended for government to be a servant to the people for the good of the people (v. 4). Try to imagine what it would be like to live in a lawless society.
7. God has given the government authority to execute wrath upon evildoers (v. 4). The word “sword” in

verse 4 refers to the state's right to punish evildoers even unto death (Gen. 9:6; John 19:10-11; Acts 25:11).

8. Two reasons are given for our submission to government: (1) to avoid penalty or punishment, and (2) to have a clear conscience with God (v. 5).
9. These are the same reasons we should pay our taxes (vv. 6-7). After all, government officials are, in reality, God's servants.

In short, Paul's teaching about the Christian's relationship to government can be summarized in two other passages:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. (Tit. 3:1)

The Apostle Peter And Civil Government

The teaching of the apostle Peter on this subject is captured in the following portion of Holy Scripture:

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for

the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. (1 Pet. 2:13-17)

From this text we may observe:

1. Our obedience to the law of the land is primarily “for the Lord’s sake” (v. 13).
2. Our obligation is to obey the laws at both the federal level (whether it be to the king, as supreme) and the state level (or unto governors).
3. By living as law-abiding citizens, we can take away the ammunition of foolish men who might charge that Christianity is an enemy of the state and the nation.
4. The liberty we have in Christ (Gal. 5:1) is not a license to act maliciously against the powers that be.

The Christian Ought To Obey God Rather Than Government

What is a man to do when the decrees of civil government and the decrees of God collide? This is not merely a hypothetical question. Consider the following cases and ask yourself what a Christian should do in such episodes.

Case #1

You are a first century Christian. The Roman government does not care whether you worship Christ, but it does

insist that you also recognize the ultimate authority of Caesar. To show your total allegiance to him, you must offer a sacrifice to Caesar. If you do, you are free, but if you refuse, you will be imprisoned, tortured and executed. Would it be right for you to disobey the law that says you must offer a sacrifice to Caesar?

Case #2

You are a Christian living in the second century. Roman law grants fathers absolute right over their children. It is common practice for newborn babies to be discarded, and left outside the city gates to die. It is also common practice for Christians, believing in the sanctity of human life, to rescue these children from death and raise them for their own. Roman authorities regard this as an infringement on the father's rights over the children. It is therefore illegal for anyone to care for a discarded infant. Would it be right for you to disobey the law and try to save the child's life and provide him a home?

Case #3

You live in a Middle Eastern country where the law specifically prohibits you from proselytizing or sharing the gospel with Muslims. In private conversations with a Muslim neighbor you see an

opportunity to share with him the good news of salvation in Christ. Would it be right to disobey the law to share Christ with him?

Case #4

You are a Christian living in India some years ago. It is a legally sanctioned social custom that when the head of a household dies, his widow is burned to death. A woman nearby has lost her husband. Tomorrow she is scheduled to be killed. Though you would be violating the law, would it be right for you to try to rescue this innocent woman from the legalized killing that is imminent unless you intervene?

Case #5

You are a Christian currently living in Sweden. You believe the Bible's instructions to discipline your children by using appropriate corporal punishment (Pro. 13:24; Pro. 22:15; Pro. 23:13-14; Pro. 29:15). But for some years now Swedish law has specifically prohibited spanking or any other corporal punishment. You would of course never abuse your children, but you love them enough to raise them the way God says to. Would it be right for you to violate the law by spanking your children?

Case #6

You are a Christian living in Nazi Germany in 1942. By law, Jews are now considered nonpersons, devoid of rights. As the government rounds them up for extermination in the camps, it is your legal responsibility to give them no aid whatsoever ... You hear of a Jewish family hiding in an abandoned building six blocks away. You know that unless they are well hidden the SS is sure to find them and send them to the camps. Would it be right for you to go to them and bring them into your own home, even if it meant putting yourself and your family at great risk?

Case #7

You live in a country where the laws state any or all of the following: only those licensed by the state can preach in churches; churches can only be open on Sundays; churches can only address religious issues, not “political” ones; home Bible studies cannot be held in many neighborhoods due to zoning restrictions; churches must not discriminate by refusing to hire homosexual staff members; churches cannot dismiss a staff member for his private sexual activities; churches are not permitted to make public statements to the assembly in accord with Matthew 18:15-20.

In any of these situations, would you or the church leaders be right in breaking the law? If so, which situations, and why? (Alcorn 29-33)

How would you handle the above situations? How should a Christian respond when government and God collide?

Fortunately, God did not leave us in the dark concerning what we should do when the decrees of man and the decrees of God clash. Clear Bible examples set down some guidelines for us to follow. The following list is not comprehensive, but sufficient to answer the question of what man should do when faced with the dilemma of obeying God or government.

Biblical Cases Of Those Who Obeyed God Rather Than Government

The Hebrew Midwives

The king of Egypt clearly instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill any and all males born to Hebrew women. The daughters born to Hebrew women could live, but the Hebrew sons would have to die (Exo. 1:16). Please note that this commandment came from the highest authority in the civil government of Egypt—the king himself. Would the Hebrew midwives obey or disobey this directive? “But the midwives feared God, and **did not as the king of Egypt commanded them**, but saved the men children alive” (Exo. 1:17, emphasis BJC). How did God respond to this act of civil disobedience on the part of the midwives? The text records that “God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty” (Exo.1:20).

Moses And The Children Of Israel

Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh and told him, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go, that

they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness” (Exo. 5:1). Pharaoh retorted, “Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD; neither will I let Israel go?” (Exo. 5:2). It would have been easy for Moses to respond forcefully to Pharaoh at this point, saying, Who do you think you are? Do you have any idea how puny you are in the sight of God? You will be sorry for your arrogance! But that is not what Moses did. Moses very respectfully appealed to the king for permission to travel three days into the desert to worship God (Exo. 5:3). Again, Pharaoh refused and even increased the torment brought upon the children of Israel (Exo. 5:5-19). Ultimately, it would take the 10 plagues to persuade Pharaoh into granting the Israelites permission to leave. However, he soon regretted his decision and pursued the Israelites to try and recapture them. The children of Israel knew that they were being pursued, but instead of giving up they followed God’s orders and made the exodus from Egypt.

Obadiah And The 100 Prophets

Obadiah was the governor of the house of Ahab and Jezebel. He knew full well that their policy was to kill the prophets of God, but because he “feared the Lord greatly” he “took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water” (1 Kin. 18:3-4). He knew that his actions were not in harmony with the policy of the administration for which he worked, but he respected God more than Ahab and Jezebel.

Jehosheba

Jehosheba was the daughter of King Joram, and she knew of Queen Athaliah’s plot to kill anyone in the royal family that might threaten her position on the throne. Consequently, Jehosheba “took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him from among the king’s sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber

from Athaliah, so that he was not slain. And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years” (2 Kin. 11:1-3). For six years, Jehosheba and her helpers deliberately thwarted the will of Queen Athaliah. Yet, the actions of Jehosheba turned out to be a great blessing for God’s people. The godly priest Jehoiada anointed Joash as king (2 Kin. 11:12-16). Athaliah was deposed and slain, and “all the people of the land rejoiced and the city was in quiet” (2 Kin. 11:20).

Hananiah, Mishael, And Azariah

Unfortunately, these men are better known by the Babylonian names given to them to humiliate them: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 1:6-7). Fortunately, no matter what you call them, these men are best known for what they did when king Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to bow before the golden image he had erected. They steadfastly refused to bow, even though the civil government they lived under commanded them to do so (Dan. 3:1-7). Nebuchadnezzar was red with rage when he heard of their civil disobedience and he commanded the men to be brought before him. Remarkably, he gave them one last chance to honor the government’s decree to bow before the golden image. However, if they refused, they would be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace (Dan. 3:13-15).

Respectfully, but firmly, without a trace of hesitation, the three Hebrew men made it absolutely clear: “We will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:18). That did it. Nebuchadnezzar only thought he was mad before. Now he was positively apoplectic! His seething rage was registered all over his face and he commanded his mightiest men to bind the three Hebrew men and throw them into the fiery furnace, which was heated seven times hotter than it was normally heated. Of course, the rest of the story is well known. Hananiah,

Mishael, and Azariah were completely unharmed by the fire. The men who threw them into the furnace did not fare as well. The heat was so strong that it killed them as they were tossing the three Hebrews into the furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar, in astonishment, called the men forth from the furnace. Not a single hair on their heads was singed. They had no burn marks. Their clothes looked the same as when they had entered. They did not even smell like smoke. Nebuchadnezzar burst forth in praise to their God and decreed that anyone who spoke against their God “shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (Dan. 3:29). Perhaps most remarkable of all is the fact that the king “promoted Shadrach, Meshach; and Abednego, in the province of Babylon” (Dan. 3:30).

Daniel

Daniel was such a man of integrity that those who hated him had to manufacture a means whereby to bring him into disfavor with the king (Dan. 6:4). All the high officials of the government approached King Darius and lathered him with praise. Then they encouraged him to sign a decree “that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions” (Dan. 6:7). They knew full well that Daniel would not honor this decree. King Darius signed the decree and, indeed

when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. (Dan. 6:10)

Predictably, the men who sought Daniel's demise lay in wait for him to pray to God, and he did not disappoint them. They turned him in to the king, and he, with great reluctance, because he admired Daniel, honored the decree and ordered Daniel to be cast into the den of lions (Dan. 6:16). The same God who protected Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the fiery furnace protected Daniel from the mouth of the lions (Dan. 6:22).

Daniel deliberately disobeyed the decree of the civil government under which he lived and yet "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Dan. 6:28). Daniel was not a rebellious troublemaker who looked for any opportunity to flout the authority of the civil government. In the first chapter of Daniel, he respectfully negotiated an agreement wherein he and his Hebrew companions could avoid defiling themselves with the king's meat (Dan. 1:8-15). He did not speak with arrogance or disrespect to the ruling officials in charge. He did not organize a revolt. At the same time, if his request had not been granted, Daniel had already purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself (Dan. 1:8). Daniel was going to do what was right in the sight of God, no matter what the earthly consequences might be for so doing. He knew how to show respect for those in authority over him, while at the same time respecting God's authority, first and foremost.

Mordecai And Esther

All the servants of king Ahasuerus bowed before Haman and revered him, "for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence" (Est. 3:2). Mordecai knew what the civil law required, but he deliberately disobeyed that law. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah would not bow and worship a golden

image, and Mordecai would not bow and worship before anyone but God.

Mordecai later learned of Haman's plot to exterminate the Jewish people. He approached Queen Esther and encouraged her to beseech the king on behalf of the Jewish people. She explained to him that the law of the land forbade anyone from approaching the king without an invitation. The penalty was death (Est. 4:11). Mordecai convinced Esther that she had to take that chance on behalf of her people and hope that the king would hold out the golden scepter to her, thus exempting her from death for her uninvited approach. She said, I will "go in unto the king, **which is not according to the law**: and if I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16; emphasis BJC). Esther broke the law in order to save innocent lives. Fortunately, the king accepted her, and ultimately the Jews were saved from death.

The Wise Men

King Herod ordered the wise men to go and search diligently for the young child, Jesus, and then to report back to him where He was (Mat. 2:7-8). Herod had authority not only in Judah but also in the regions of Galilee and Palestine. Although the wise men were foreigners, they would still have been expected to obey the law of the land while visiting. However, God warned them not to obey King Herod, and they chose to obey God rather than man (Mat. 2:12).

The Apostles

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles boldly proclaimed the Gospel. The leading Jewish authorities called them in and "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18). Peter and John boldly replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye. For we

cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). The chief priests and elders threatened them further and then let them go.

It did not take long for the apostles to reappear before the council. The high priest, outraged at the healings performed by the apostles and the growing influence of the church, imprisoned the apostles. The angel of the Lord released them from prison that very night and told them to “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:19-20). They did so, and word quickly circulated to the Jewish officials that the apostles were gone from the prison and standing in the temple, teaching the people (Acts 5:21-25). The apostles were once again arrested and the high priest confronted them, “Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” . . . “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men**” (Acts 5:28-29; emphasis BJC). The apostles were then beaten and ordered “that they should not speak in the name of Jesus” (Acts 5:40). Did the apostles obey the governing body this time?¹ On the contrary, “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

The nine examples above prove that there are times when civil disobedience is equivalent to religious obedience. The authority of government never supersedes the authority of God. It is clear that God never expects His children to honor the will of human government over His will. Hence, if the government demanded tomorrow that we install women as elders and preachers in the Lord’s church or face punishment for discrimination, then we must obey God rather than men. In short, if the government seeks to bind upon us a law that would necessitate our disobedience to the Law of God, then we must obey God rather than men!

Avoiding The Extremes

A word of caution is due just here. It is imperative that we avoid rushing headlong into the idea that we can arbitrarily disobey the dictates of our government under the guise of obeying God rather than men. To disobey the government we had better have some solid, biblical reasons for so doing. Concerning the examples of civil disobedience in Scripture, Warren Wiersbe observes:

To begin with, each of these “objectors” had a message from God that could not be questioned. The midwives and Moses’ parents knew that it was wrong to murder the babies. Daniel and his friends, and the three Hebrew men, knew that it was wrong to eat food offered to idols or to bow down to idols in worship. Peter and John knew that they were under orders from their Master to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and that it would be wrong to obey the Sanhedrin. All of these people were faithfully obeying a clear word from God and not just following some selfish personal whim of their own. Second, their convictions touched every area of their lives. In other words, they did everything “with conscience toward God” (1 Peter 2:19) because they belonged to God. The university student today whose conscience permits him to cheat on exams or drive while drunk, but not register for military service, does not convince me that he is really cultivating

a healthy conscience. When a person's total life is under the direction of a godly conscience, then I find it easier to have confidence in his unpopular decisions.

D. W. Gill adds:

Those who are led to engage in civil disobedience must remain humble and rigorously self-critical. Many Christians would also argue that while disobedience is possible, insubordination is not. This means that during and after the disobedience the practitioners should remain subordinate to the penalties and consequences meted out by the civil authority (jail, punishment, exile, etc.).

Yet again, some have abused the concept of civil disobedience by refusing to pay income taxes on the grounds that the government uses the revenue improperly. We have seen already that Jesus instructed His followers to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's (Mat. 22:15-22). Do you suppose that Jesus agreed with everything that Caesar (Rome) did with the revenue they received from taxes? Also, remember that the Holy Spirit led Paul to write, "Render therefore to all their due; taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (NKJV, Rom. 13:7). Did Paul not know how corrupt the Roman government was at the time he penned these words? In fact, it was as bad as, or worse, than many governments of today. Yet, Paul still commanded the Roman Christians to pay their taxes.

The Christian Ought To Trust In God Over Government

At least three interpretations concerning Christian's involvement in civil government are possible.

1. Some Christians believe that the state is so corrupt that Christians should have as little to do with it as possible. Although they should be good citizens as long as they can do so without compromising their beliefs, they should not work for the government, vote in elections, or serve in the military.

2. Others believe that God has given the state authority in certain areas and the church authority in others. Christians can be loyal to both and can work for either. They should not, however, confuse the two. In this view, church and state are concerned with two totally different spheres—the spiritual and the physical—and thus complement each other but do not work together.

3. Still others believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better. They can do this politically, by electing Christian or other high-principled leaders. They can also do this morally, by serving as an influence for good in society. (Barton et al.)

Without a doubt, the best way to revolutionize the American nation (or any nation for that matter) is to convert one person at a time to the holy nation that belongs to Jesus

Christ, the church (Mat. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 2:5-9; Col. 3:1ff). The middle verses of the Bible declare: "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Psa. 118:8-9). Neither the United Nations, the Congress, nor the White House can pass enough legislation to make the world a better place apart from Christ. Civil government, in and of itself, is insufficient to save the world. Our best hope to change the world is by getting our fellow man to trust in the One Who made this world and Who has prepared a better world for us in the age to come.

The Christian Should Seek To Preserve A Godly Government

Having acknowledged that the Gospel is superior to government in creating a better world, it is apparent that the more righteous the climate of a nation is, the better the chance is of finding receptive hearts for the Gospel plan of salvation. It is harder to reach souls for Christ in a lawless, immoral society than it is in a society that reveres and respects the moral code of the Bible. The early leaders of America certainly understood that it is impossible to have a moral nation without having men with morals in the leadership of the government. Consider the following well-known quotations:

The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil Constitutions and laws... All the miseries and evil which men suffer from... proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. (Noah Webster)

Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion... reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle (George Washington).

Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad. But if men be bad... the government will never be good... good laws may lack good men... but good men will never lack good laws, nor allow bad ones. (William Penn)

As marvelous as these quotations are, we do not have to rely upon them to make our point. In fact, even more powerful proof is found in Holy Scripture. Proverbs 29:2 proves that life is better when the righteous are in authority. The passage declares: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man beareth rule, the people groan." Since the people rejoice when the righteous are in authority, should it not be the goal of every Christian to attempt to put the righteous into these places of authority? Since righteousness exalts a nation (Pro. 14:34), should not every Christian seek to elect officials who adhere to righteous principles and practice?

The stark contrast between a righteous and unrighteous ruler is evidenced on many pages of the Old and New Testament. Consider the difference between Haman (Est. 3:15) and Mordecai (Est. 8:15). Read the history of the kings of Judah and Israel and see if the righteousness or unrighteousness of these rulers had any impact upon these

nations. And what about the ruler Herod? Did not his attitude toward righteousness affect the people over whom he reigned (Mat. 2:1-3; Mat. 2:16-18)? His subjects did not have the opportunity to vote him out of office for someone better. They were stuck without the right to vote. However, those of us who possess the right and privilege to vote can help to determine the moral climate in which our children will be raised.

Accordingly, it is the conviction of this author that Christians, as individuals, should not completely divorce themselves from the consideration of political issues and the election of suitable political officials. Rather, Christians should do everything within their power to put moral leaders into positions of power in every level of government, whether it be local, state, or federal.

We have the opportunity and obligation to try to leaven our society by either running for office as individuals or seeking to vote individuals committed to righteous principles into office. Furthermore, these “principles of righteousness” will be as broad as the New Testament and not as narrow as the platform of a particular political party. Hence, we will look for candidates who are as concerned about the poor as they are the unborn and vice versa.

Please observe that I am not writing this chapter as a Republican, nor am I writing as a Democrat. I am not even writing as an Independent. I am writing as a Christian. Whenever I enter the voting booth, I do not enter it as a Democrat, Republican, or an Independent. After all, it was not a Republican or Democrat who died for my sins. And it will not be a Democrat or a Republican sitting on the judgment seat on the Day of Judgment.

I belong to Christ. He died to purchase my redemption. Therefore, whenever I enter the voting booth, I will remember

that the Democratic Party does not own me. The Republican Party does not own me. Christ owns me. That is what the word *Christian* means. The question is this: When I vote, will I vote as a Christian in name only? Will my vote reflect Christian principles, or will it help to elect a candidate whose positions are blatantly antagonistic to the moral teaching of the Christ to Whom I belong? When I vote, will I turn a blind eye to the positions of the candidate I am voting for simply because he/she has a (D) or an (R) after his/her name? Will my allegiance to the political party my family has always voted for be greater than my allegiance to Christ?

HWJV?

Just a few years ago, the letters *WWJD?* were prominently displayed on bracelets, sweatshirts, etc. The letters stood for the words *What Would Jesus Do?* The emphasis was that we should strive to imitate Jesus in all that we do. This is certainly a biblical principle. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). We are to endeavor to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). We should follow the example of Christ and “follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). We ought to walk “even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Whatever we do, in word or in deed, we are to do all by the authority of Jesus (Col. 3:17). We are to do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

So what about the letters *HWJV?* They stand for the words *How Would Jesus Vote?* Some may argue that Jesus would not vote, but such an assertion cannot be substantiated. Since the government under which Jesus lived on earth was not a democracy, there was no opportunity for Him to cast a vote for a candidate. Nevertheless, Jesus revealed enough about Himself and God’s will to enable us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt what would matter most to Him in an election. We know that Jesus “loved righteousness and

hated iniquity” (Heb. 1:9). We have already observed that “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pro. 14:34). Now, surely we can agree with the following conclusion: (1) Jesus loves righteousness, (2) righteousness exalts a nation, (3) therefore, if Jesus were to vote He would vote for the candidate whose agenda would do the most to advance righteousness. What is righteousness? All of God’s commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172). The true Christian does not cast his vote on the basis of party allegiance. Rather, the Christian casts his vote on the basis of an allegiance to the inspired and righteous principles of the Word of God. Accordingly, we should vote for the candidate whose platform most closely reflects the righteous principles contained within God’s Word. Admittedly, determining this is not always an exact science. At the same time, it is not as fuzzy as some would have us believe.

All things that pertain to life and godliness have been provided for us within the verses of Holy Scripture (2 Pet. 1:3). With this in mind, let us examine some verses to vote by.

Exodus 18:21

“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”

We get some help on the specifics of what we should look for in a leader from the counsel Jethro gave to Moses. Jethro warned his son-in-law that he was going to wear himself out trying to judge personally every dispute among the Israelites. Jethro instructed Moses to delegate some of these responsibilities to other qualified men. What qualifications did Jethro list for these appointed judges/rulers? He told Moses to choose “out of all the people **able men, such as fear**

God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:” (Exo. 18:21; emphasis BJC). What a tremendous litmus test this is for us to use in evaluating any candidate for leadership!

1. Look for a candidate that is able. Believing the right things does not necessarily qualify one for a particular office. For instance, I believe everything that the Bible says but that does not, in and of itself, qualify me to run for President. I do not have the knowledge or experience to govern a nation. Consequently, it is not enough to have the right convictions; there must also be an ability to handle the job.

2. Look for a candidate that fears God. To truly fear God is to reverence His Word and keep His commandments (Ecc. 12:13). It is possible for a candidate, in his public speeches, to give lip service to honoring God, only to turn around and advocate an agenda which is blatantly anti-biblical. Sprinkling a quote of Scripture into a political speech in order to gain favor with a particular block of voters is not what it means to respect the Bible and fear God. Titus 1:16 informs us that it is not enough to profess to know God. Some profess to know God, but by their works they deny Him. Their actions speak louder than their words. Likewise, if a candidate cites a Scripture, says “God Bless America” at the end of his speeches, and then promotes the shedding of innocent blood by advocating the right to abortion, his actions speak a lot louder than his words!

It would be wonderful to find a candidate who respected the Bible and who endeavored to keep **all** of the commandments of God, but most often this is not the case. So what should we do when none of the candidates fear God to the fullest extent? The only thing we can do is look for a discernible, verifiable difference between the positions of the

candidates and then vote for the one whose platform most closely aligns with the righteous principles of God's Word. Now obviously, if Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden were alive on earth today and running against one another in an election, and they were the only candidates, I could not vote for either one of them because they are both so clearly opposed to biblical principles.

However, most elections are not between two madmen. Having said that, I am fully aware of the fact that none of the candidates for President are perfect men or women. Nor do I know of any presidential candidate that follows the Bible on every single issue. Nevertheless, we need to remember that we are not electing the Messiah when we cast our vote in an election. The Messiah already reigns in heaven above, and He reigns in the heart and life of the true Christian. Nevertheless, my vote should reflect a commitment to the principles of the Messiah.

3. Look for a candidate that is a man of truth. Admittedly, this becomes difficult in the realm of politics. Undoubtedly, both Democrats and Republicans have had their troubles with the truth. Richard Nixon (R) lied to the American people about Watergate. Bill Clinton (D) lied to the American people about Monica Lewinsky. In every election, it seems that one candidate is always accusing the other(s) of lying to the American people. So who is telling the truth? What is a Christian to do when both sides claim that the other candidate is not a person of truth? The only thing we can do is try to cut through the maze of political spin and to look at the consistency or inconsistency of a candidate's statements, and then determine to the best of our ability which candidate is more believable.

Admittedly, this is not an exact science, but it important to try to find a candidate who is a person of truth. When

any candidate says one thing to one group and turns right around and says the opposite to another group, and when this is a consistent pattern, and not just a slip of the tongue, then there is clear evidence that such a candidate is not a person of integrity. The importance of truth in high office is emphasized in the Book of Proverbs: “Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right” (Pro. 16:13). “If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked” (Pro. 29:12).

4. Look for a candidate that hates covetousness. It is important that a leader not be obsessed with the acquisition of wealth; otherwise, he might compromise the principles of right and wrong for material gain. The Proverbs writer emphasized this truth: “The prince that wanteth [lacketh] understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days” (Pro. 28:16). Another fascinating text is Proverbs 29:4, wherein we read: “The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.” In other words, a leader ought to lead according to the principles of justice, according to what is right and wrong, and not on the basis of who is bribing him with gifts. One of the major problems in American politics is that candidates are willing to support unrighteous causes in exchange for political contributions. It is wrong for a political candidate to support gay rights or abortion, etc., in order to appease activist groups who promise money in exchange for their support.

I am sure that most astute observers would agree that the problem of bowing to the demands of special interest groups is a problem that affects both political parties. Again, the only thing we can do as Christians, who are trying to be salt and light in our communities, is to be as informed as possible, and to see which candidate has the most courage

to stand up for what is right—even if it means the loss of support from special interest groups.

Proverbs 16:8

“Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.”

In other words, IT’S NOT ABOUT THE ECONOMY, STUPID! Lest the reader be offended by my use of the word *stupid* I would remind the reader of where this language originated. In the 1992 election, advisors to Bill Clinton explained that they needed to narrow the emphasis of their campaign down to one simple formula. Would they focus on foreign policy, on social issues, or on the economy? They decided to zero in on the economy and thus came up with a slogan to remind them to stay on message. The slogan they came up with was, “It’s the economy, stupid!” Yet, as you can see from the passage in Proverbs 16:8, God does not see it that way!

Of course, we all want to live in a nation that has a strong economy, but according to the Holy Spirit, if we had to choose between being economically strong and being morally upright, it would be better to have a little with righteousness than to have great revenues without right. Perhaps no leader has ever presided over a stronger economy than did Solomon. Read 1 Kings chapters 4-10, and you will be astonished at the immense wealth of Solomon’s kingdom. 2 Chronicles 1:15 describes the economy of Solomon’s day: “And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance.”

“But king Solomon loved many strange women” and allowed these women to lead him into idolatry (1 Kin. 11:1-4). In spite of a tremendous economy, “Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the

LORD, as did David his father” (1 Kin. 11:6). His leadership in economic matters was unparalleled, but he also led a nation into idolatry (1 Kin. 11:7). Consequently, the Lord was angry with Solomon and took his kingdom away from him (1 Kin. 11:9-13). **Let this truth sink in: in spite of a booming economy, God voted Solomon out of office!** What does that tell you about what matters to God when it comes to a nation’s leaders? We need to remember that “It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: **for the throne is established by righteousness**” (Pro. 16:12; emphasis BJC). It is high time—indeed it is past time, for God’s people to put morals over money when it comes to casting their votes!

Proverbs 25:5

“Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. “

A leader is often only as good as the counselors with whom he surrounds himself. Wicked counselors who give bad advice to a leader are a blight upon the nation. We all remember what happened to Rehoboam who rejected the wise counsel of the older men and followed after the horrible advice of the younger men instead (1 Kin. 12:6-15). Consequently, the people mourned. No wonder the Proverbs writer wrote, “When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Pro. 29:2).

It is important for a leader to surround himself with righteous advisers rather than wicked counselors. The views of a President’s cabinet and the views of the judges whom he appoints reveal much to us about the wisdom (or lack thereof) of the leader who appointed them. According to Proverbs 25:5, if you take away wicked advisers from a leader, you will help to establish a more righteous government.

Proverbs 20:8; Proverbs 20:26

“A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. . . . A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.”

This passage indicates that the wise leader is tough on crime. He will appoint judgment and justice to be meted out against the wicked. In fact, the phrase “bringeth the wheel over them” demonstrates that the wise leader deals severely with evildoers. Since leaders set the tone for the nation, a leader that is tough on criminal activity actually helps to create a safer environment.

Proverbs 28:15

“As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.”

Proverbs 29:14

“The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever.”

Proverbs 31:9

“Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

The three texts above show us that God is concerned about equitable treatment of the poor and needy. God expects for a leader to deal justly with the poor and needy. Now some would misinterpret this to mean that the leader of the government should give free handouts to all poor people without regard to their work ethic. However, God does not contradict Himself, and we know that the same God who authored the three verses above also wrote that “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 The. 3:10). To vote for a candidate who pledges to give handouts to those who will not even try to find a job is to vote against the righteous principle of Holy Scripture that if a man will not work, neither should he eat. Hunger is very motivational, and if we reward the

lazy with food they have not worked for, we are perpetuating their lifestyle of lethargy.

Of course, many are legitimately disabled or unemployed through no fault of their own. In fact, it is important that we not go to an extreme and act as if there are no legitimately poor people. The leader of a nation ought to be concerned about the needs of all men, both rich and poor. A righteous leader will not attack the rich or the poor. He will fight for the rights of both. He will not punish those who are reaping the rewards of hard work. At the same time he will fight against policies that would unfairly oppress the poor and needy.

Psalm 139:13-16

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

Jeremiah 1:5

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

Luke 1:44; Luke 2:12

“For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy . . . And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

It is considered politically incorrect to oppose abortion. After all, a woman’s body is her own and we have no right to tell her what she can and cannot do with it. At least, that is what we are told. However, as the verses above demonstrate, the biblically correct view is vastly different. The Bible teaches that all of life is sacred—from the womb to the tomb.

Whereas the Bible does not say explicitly, “Thou shalt not have an abortion,” it does forbid the shedding of innocent blood, which is precisely what abortion is (Pro. 6:17). In fact, type the words *innocent blood* into your Bible software program and get ready for some reading. At least twenty passages speak of how God views the shedding of innocent blood. Shedding innocent blood is no small matter in the eyes of God; it is an abomination! How then can the child of God cast a vote for a politician who has blatantly promised to perpetuate the practice of that which God calls abominable?

The Scriptures implicitly teach that life in the womb is sacred. Look again at the declaration of the Psalmist to God:

For you have formed my inward parts;
you have covered me in my mother’s
womb, I will praise you, for I am fearfully
and wonderfully made . . . my frame was
not hidden from you, when I was made
in secret, and skillfully wrought in the
lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw
my substance being yet unformed. (Psa.
139:13-16)

One cannot read this passage and the passage in Jeremiah 1:5, without recognizing that God acknowledges life in the womb as worthy of His notice. It is not just a “blob of tissue.”

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit described John the Baptizer in the womb as *brephos*, a Greek word translated “babe” (Luke 1:41-44). This exact same Greek word is used to describe Jesus after He had been born (Luke 2:12), thus demonstrating that in God’s eyes both are equally human. The only difference is in development and environment. A small crumb of bread is still bread and a tiny human being is still a human being.

The biblically correct view also points out that a body other than the woman’s body is involved in every abortion. It is, of course, the tiny body of the unborn child that is shredded, mutilated, and extracted from the woman’s body. All of the fancy talk and politically correct references to the fetus can not change the stark truth and reality of abortion. Abortion is the deliberate taking of a human life. Do you doubt it? Well, answer a couple of questions please. Is that which is in the woman’s body a human being? Of course it is! From whence did it come? From two human beings! At conception, a tiny human being is formed.

Is that which is in the woman’s body alive? Well, why do you think abortion is necessary? Everyone knows that a living human being is developing in the mother’s womb and that if something is not done to prevent it, this living human being will finally be born. The fetus is human, for it came from two humans. The fetus is alive or else it would not be necessary to kill it; thus every abortion is the deliberate killing of innocent human life. That sounds a lot like the definition of murder to me.

In the future, when you go into the voting booth, will you remember that shedding innocent blood is an abomination

in the sight of God?! Will someone please tell me how a child of God can conscientiously cast a vote for a politician who has blatantly promised to perpetuate the practice of that which God calls abominable?!

Leviticus 18:22

“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

Matthew 19:4

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

Genesis 2:24

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

The very foundations of marriage and the home are under attack and sadly, many political leaders are leading the charge. To condemn homosexuality is politically incorrect. However, those who are interested in biblical correctness will say, “Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination” (Lev. 18:22). Suppose that a Presidential candidate answered a question about homosexuality by saying, My position about homosexuality is identical to that of the Holy Bible. I believe that homosexuality is vile, against nature, shameful, and the activity of a debased mind (Rom. 1:26-27). If a candidate so answered, the media and politically correct crowd would crucify him. Though considered politically incorrect, he would be biblically correct, and, all

other things being equal, he would receive my vote if his opponent believed otherwise. We need to realize that our vote may pave the way for the destruction of our society, because the downfall of the home is but a prelude to the downfall of a nation!

Conclusion

The relationship between the Christian and civil government is often complex. The simple truth of the matter is that God ordained government for the benefit of His creation. We must honor government, but never more than we honor God.

We must honor the call of our Lord to be salt and light in this unbelieving world (Mat. 5:14-16; Phi. 2:16). The greatest impact the church can make upon society is through the lives of its individual members. We can change the world by changing the people in the world. For example, though the New Testament contains no express command forbidding slavery, the attitudes bound upon men toward their fellow men within the New Testament, if practiced, will abolish slavery in a culture. The book of Philemon is a good example.

In addition to influencing the culture through the proclamation of the Gospel, both by my lips and my life, I must determine to be salt and light by assisting the most righteous leaders with my vote. It may not be possible to elect a man who perfectly meets every qualification, and God forbid, the time may come when all candidates are equally immoral in their platforms. However, when there is a clear and discernible moral divide between the candidates, the Christian must vote on the basis of Christianity. He must vote in such a way as to advance the cause of moral righteousness!

When I know that Jesus loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Heb. 1:9), and when I know that He hates the

shedding of innocent blood (Pro. 6:16-17) and that He opposes “same-sex marriage” (Gen. 2; Mat. 19:4-6), I cannot, and will not, punch a card, pull the lever, or touch the screen for a candidate who is determined to promote that which my Lord opposes! Neither will I boycott the ballot box and let such a candidate be elected by my failure to be salt and light!

Notes

¹ Some have argued that the episode in Acts 4-5 is not an example of civil disobedience because the disobedience was not directed against the civil power, Rome, but against the religious authority of the Jewish Sanhedrin. However, the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin was far-reaching. The Sanhedrin was authorized to order arrests and to judge cases which did not involve capital punishment. At the very least the account in Acts proves that disobedience of higher authority is justified if the authority requires a believer to disobey the laws of God.

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Military Intelligence: Knowing Our Enemy And His Devices

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The Christian life is illustrated in various ways throughout the New Testament. It is referred to as the way (KJV, Acts 9:1-2; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:22), running a race (1 Cor. 9:24; Gal. 5:7; Heb. 12:1), and Olympic-style games (1 Cor. 9:25-26; 2 Tim. 2:5). One of the more familiar pictures of the Christian life painted by the apostle Paul is that of a warring soldier. He admonished Timothy to “war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18) and to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). Paul instructed the Corinthians that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4). But perhaps the greatest military parallel of the Christian fight is the armor of God:

Wherefore take unto you the whole
armour of God, that ye may be able to

withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:13-17)

Christians are soldiers in the army of Jesus Christ, fully equipped to wage war against the adversary of mankind (1 Pet. 5:8). There is nothing lacking in our armor and there is none better to lead us than the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). But how can we defeat our enemy if we do not know him? How can we prepare for battle if we are unaware of his devices? Sun Tzu, a sixth century BC Chinese general and military tactician is quoted as saying, “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the results of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat” (39). If we are to be victorious in battle and win the war for our souls, we must know the enemy, his strategies, tactics, and battle plan!

Knowing Our Enemy

Our Enemy Exists.

To defeat the enemy, we must first be willing to admit that he exists. Speaking of the lack of a coherent strategy to destroy the threat of Islamic terrorism, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn (who also served as the Director of the Defense

Intelligence Agency) said, “You can’t defeat an enemy that you don’t admit exists and I think that we have to clearly define what the enemy is. That’s number one.” Christians have an enemy; his name is Satan—he is real!

Our enemy is known by various appellations. In parabolic teaching Jesus referred to him simply as “the enemy” (Mat. 13:28; Mat. 13:39), the Greek term meaning one who hates and opposes another (Thayer). In the Revelation, he is identified as “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan” (Rev. 12:9). Jesus referred to Satan as the “prince of this world” (John 12:31), Paul identified him as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2; cf. Rev. 9:1-2), and John spoke of him as “the wicked one” (1 John 2:13-14).

Satan, the adversary (1 Pet. 5:8) and deceiver of mankind (Rev. 12:9), is not simply the personification of evil; he is not a literary device intended simply to demonstrate wickedness. The Devil is a real being; the reality of his existence is evidenced in that he has desires (John 8:44), deceives (Gen. 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9), can flee (Jam. 4:7), and can be rebuked (Jude 9). Above all, a place of punishment has been prepared for him: “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Satan is real and his existence is just as certain as the reality of the lost in eternity.

Our Enemy Is Dangerous.

Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to tempt his faith to the verge of overthrow (Luke 22:30-31), and Peter pictured Satan as a vicious beast seeking prey: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). In the Revelation, Satan is symbolized as “a great red dragon”

(Rev. 12:3). Commenting on this verse, Homer Haley made the following observation,

The dragon symbol describes Satan's ferocious nature, "great" denotes his power and influence, while his blood-red color emphasizes his murderous character, for "he was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), ever working for the death of God's people. His seven heads indicate fullness of intelligence and infernal wisdom, the master mind of craftiness and cunning which operates through lying and deceit (2 Cor. 11:3). His ten horns symbolize fullness of power within his realm of operation. The picture is one of complete diabolical power, wisdom, and cunning against which the church must fight for its survival. (270)

Such warnings clearly demonstrate the dangerous character of our enemy! Satan is the very essence of evil. He is the father of lies, the first of all murderers, opposed to all that is good.

Our Enemy Is Influential.

The word *influence* has its origins from an old Latin term that means "to flow into." As late as the fourteenth century, *influence* was used as an astrological term with the sense of a "streaming ethereal power from the stars when in certain positions, acts upon the character or destiny of men" ("Influence"). The strong influence of Satan through temptations to satisfy lustful desires has flowed throughout

the history of mankind shaping and affecting the character, disposition, and actions of the human population.

Satan's influence over sinful man hindered Paul from personally strengthening the Thessalonian saints (1 The. 2:17-18), inspired Ananias and Sapphira to lie to God (Acts 5:3), and motivated Judas to betray his Master (Luke 22:1-4). There is not one sin of which man is guilty where Satan has not been an influence: no murder has been committed; no lie has been told; no act of adultery carried out; no theft perpetrated; no act of violence and abuse against innocence inflicted but that Satan was behind it! Perhaps no admonition from the writings of Paul is greater than that given to the Ephesians: "Neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). The influence through temptations and trials that Satan has is very real and dangerous indeed.

Our Enemy Has Weaknesses.

Though our adversary is real and dangerous we ought not fear, for the enemy has many weaknesses. Satan is decidedly powerful, but that power is limited. He has the ability to influence man to sin, but he cannot force him. The devil tempted Jesus to jump, but he did not push (Mat. 4:6); he tempted Jesus to worship him, but he could not force such reverence and devotion (Mat. 4:9). The limitation of Satan's power is clearly demonstrated in the inspired record of Job: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand" (Job 1:12). The oft used axiom "the devil made me do it" is as weak as it is false! The devil never made anyone do anything. He may influence and persuade; he may tempt and entice, but he is powerless to force one to sin.

Satan is worthy of neither honor nor reverence from man! It is not before the god of this world that man should stand in awe but before the God of heaven: the Deliverer

and Redeemer of mankind. Jesus admonished us, “Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28). While the influences of our enemy have seduced many into the darkness of sin, we must realize that he has many weaknesses.

Our Enemy Is Mortally Wounded.

From the Garden of Eden our enemy has pursued a destructive course. Through the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, the old serpent instigated the fall of man (Gen. 3:6; 1 John 2:16), but his course to destroy the pinnacle of God’s creation only served to bring about his own end. The first prophecy of Scripture pictures the overthrow of our enemy through the death of our Lord: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; **it shall bruise thy head**, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15; emphasis RS). This bruise to the head of Satan was the death and resurrection of the seed of woman: Jesus Christ. It was a death stroke from which our enemy will never recover!

With this mortal wound in view, the Hebrews writer affirmed,

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14-15)

In order for Jesus to deliver us from Satan, He had to experience death. In the Garden Jesus prayed, “O my Father,

if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mat. 26:39), but there was no other way for victory over Satan to be won. Thus, through His death Jesus destroyed “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). Yet one might say, But we still die. This is true, but through the death of Jesus the **power** of death has been destroyed! We know we will die (Heb. 9:27); we even know the process of death (Gen. 35:18; Ecc. 12:7; Jam. 2:26), but we also know that we will rise again (John 5:28-29). Thus, Paul could write:

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:53-55)

Satan's Defeat Is Certain.

Though Satan has been stripped of the power of death, he continues to fight. He maintains an influence over man that is strong and many have joined his cause. Nevertheless, the ultimate defeat of this diabolical deceiver is certain.

My wife is a lover of books, but her approach to reading is unique; the first chapter of any book she reads is the last chapter. Her reasoning is this, If the book ends well I will read it, but if I do not like the ending of the book I will not waste my time. Have you ever read the final chapter of God's book? We win! The adversary of man is not victorious over the Lamb, but rather the Lamb over the adversary.

Consider the following passages that clearly demonstrate our victory in Christ over Satan: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7); “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11); “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev. 2:17); “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5); “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God” (Rev. 3:12); “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne” (Rev. 3:21); “And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2); “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14); “He that overcometh shall inherit all things” (Rev. 21:7). The terms “overcometh,” “conquering,” and “conquer” in these passages are translated from a particular Greek word, the root of which means “get the victory” (Strong).

So certain is the defeat of our adversary that God has prepared a place “for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). It is a place of “everlasting fire” (Mat. 25:41) and “everlasting punishment” (Mat. 25:46). In Christ we can overcome our enemy. Through diligent watchfulness, we will not let him gain the advantage over us!

The Enemy’s Devices

If admitting the enemy exists and defining who or what the enemy is is “number one,” then knowing the enemy and his tactics must be the second most important element in preparation for combat. In our modern age

of technology, we hear military commanders using such terms as tactical intelligence, operational intelligence, and actionable intelligence. How important is such intelligence to military planning? In his web article, "Intelligence in War: It Can Be Decisive," George Elder, Defense Intelligence Agency employee and winner of the 2004 US Army Strategic Landpower Award wrote:

Force and its employment are significant in driving outcomes in combat. However, it is operational and tactical intelligence, not necessarily numbers, technology, or tactics, that can have the most decisive impact on how forces are employed and how success is achieved in wartime operations. History repeatedly has demonstrated that numerically inferior forces, armed with less capable technologies, can win when leaders are armed with accurate intelligence they believe they can act upon. Such intelligence can be a force multiplier.

How soundly echo the words of the great Sun Tzu: "Thus, what enables the wise sovereign and the good general to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men is foreknowledge" (88). Knowledge of the enemy provides us with awareness and understanding that we can use to our advantage. Intelligence empowers us, prepares us, and enables us to defeat an enemy more powerful than ourselves. God has both identified our enemy and provided us with the intelligence needed soundly to defeat him. What then are the devices of our enemy?

Satan's Device Of Deceit

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

From the beginning of creation, Satan has used deceit to subdue mankind. Through deceit he brought about the fall of man: lying to Eve, he convinced her that God was unjust and unfair, withholding from man great blessings (Gen. 3:1-5). From that time Satan's deceitful influence has pervaded the human race. Consider the biblical record: for fear of his life Abraham sought to deceive Pharaoh in the matter of his relationship with Sarah (Gen. 12:14-20); following in his father's footsteps, Isaac hid the truth about his wife Rebekah from the Philistines (Gen. 26:6-11); Rebekah encouraged Jacob to deceive Isaac to gain the blessing of his father (Gen. 27:6-29); to honor his family tradition, Laban deceived Jacob giving him Leah in marriage rather than Rachel (Gen. 29:15-30); the sons of Jacob practiced deceit when they sold Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:23-35).

Israel was forever plagued with lies and deceit. Jeroboam, beguiling the nation of Israel, ordained a feast "like unto the feast that is in Judah" (1 Kin. 12:32). The people of Israel "taught their tongues to speak lies" (Jer. 9:5) and the rulers of the people made refuge of lies and hid themselves under falsehood (Isa. 28:14-15). Even the prophets were overcome with deceit: "The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither

spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart” (Jer. 14:14). So greatly deceived by idolatry became the people that lies are pictured as an inheritance passed down through generations (Jer. 16:19).

In the New Testament also, we find Satan’s success with the device of deceit: Judas fraudulently held the money bag (John 12:4-6); Jewish leaders falsely accused Christ before Pilate saying, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar” (Luke 23:2); and early Christians Ananias and Sapphira lied about their financial support for the work of the church (Acts 5:1-10). How effectively has Satan used deceit to pervert the right ways of God and overcome man!

Satan’s Device Of Lust

One of our enemy’s most effective tactics is to use our own weaknesses against us. God created man with certain innate desires or drives that, when controlled and used properly, are to our advantage. For example, we have a hunger drive that causes us to eat. Our hunger drive keeps us both alive and healthy; it is not sinful to satisfy a desire to eat. The apostle Peter made spiritual application from this fundamental desire when he wrote, “As newborn babes, **desire** the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2; emphasis RS). Similarly, man has the natural desire to be accepted: children want to be accepted by their parents; youth want to be accepted by their peers; women want to be accepted by their husbands and husbands by their wives. The ultimate benefit for man of this approval drive is his desire to be accepted by his Creator, which fosters faithful obedience to God (Acts 10:34-35; 2 Cor. 5:9; Heb. 11:6, etc.). Furthermore, God has created in man a sexual drive. This desire both brings physical pleasure and assures the propagation of the

human race. As with all other desires, it is not sinful to fulfill our sexual drive as long as that fulfillment is found within God's boundaries. However, when man seeks satisfaction of natural and legitimate desires in violation to God's law, i.e., the longing for sexual satisfaction outside of marriage, that desire becomes a sinful desire. Paul made this abundantly clear when instructing the Corinthians "to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). When the thought of satisfaction gives pleasure and non-satisfaction brings on pain, but that satisfaction can only be found in sin, such desire is called lust. Lust is an anxious self-seeking without any regard to the will and commands of God. It is a danger against which man must be warned and must fight (Kittle).

Satan, the great deceiver and enemy of man seeks to take these desires, which in some become weaknesses, and turn them against us! James instructed,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (Jam. 1:13-15)

Fully revealed is the ungodly spirit that resides in our enemy! Seeking to pervert innocent desires to our destruction, Satan searches out the opportunity and devices to draw us away from a place of safety and ensnare us in a

sinful state. In his commentary on James, the beloved and scholarly Guy N. Woods wrote:

The illustration which James uses of enticement is that of the blandishments of a harlot; and the means used, those common to fishermen and hunters. As a fisherman uses the most attractive sort of bait, or the most alluring fly to induce the fish to strike, so Satan tempts us by means of those things which are to us most desirable. (59)

How diabolical indeed is our enemy; taking those things which God has given for our fulfillment and turning them into sinful temptations. To overcome such treachery, we need only to remember the admonition of the beloved apostle:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (1 John 2:15–17)

Satan's Device Of Pride

Pride in the sense of happiness derived from accomplishing something is a good thing. After years of hard work, a young man will find pride from earning a Master's

degree in his chosen discipline. Following years of sacrifices and adversities, a woman will most certainly find such pride from building a successful business. In fact, a pride that demonstrates a healthy sense of self-esteem should be desired; pride in one's appearance, work, and accomplishments is a worthy trait. But when one becomes lifted up with pride and views others contemptuously, his pride becomes a sin and he falls into the snare and condemnation of the devil.

The Bible defines sinful pride as an arrogance and haughtiness that always draws the wrath of God's judgment. Isaiah wrote, "For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isa. 2:12). Cataloguing the unrighteousness of the Gentiles, Paul listed pride with such sins as fornication, murder, haters of God, and inventors of evil things (Rom. 1:29-30). Inspiration teaches us that "God resisteth the proud" (Jam. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5), and that "the pride of life" is of the world (1 John 2:16), but our wily enemy seeks to cause us to think more of ourselves than we ought. A sense of satisfaction for accomplishing good is worthy indeed, but when one allows pride to create a false sense of self-worth, he perverts a very honorable quality.

Satan's Device Of Discouragement

Perhaps no other word in the common vernacular is more opposed to the Christian spirit than *discouragement*. Webster defines *discourage* as "To extinguish the courage of; to dishearten; to depress the spirits of; to deprive of confidence; to deject" ("Discourage"). The very idea of discouragement is to send courage away ("Discourage", *Online*), and that is exactly what our adversary seeks to accomplish! Without courage we have no strength. In the absence of courage our will to press forward is diminished. Through discouragement, Satan depresses our spirit and draws away our confidence. No

less than five times Joshua was admonished to “be strong and of a good courage” (Deu. 31:7; Deu. 31:23; Jos. 1:6-18), for with courage comes strength and the fortitude to accomplish the will of God.

Some of the greatest of mankind have been brought low through the adversary’s device of discouragement. Elijah became so discouraged that he requested to die (1 Kin. 19:1-18). Jeremiah’s hopelessness was so overwhelming that at one point he determined, “I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name” (Jer. 20:9). Abraham must have endured discouragement for Jehovah appeared to him saying, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). No doubt that John, in prison, was depressed, even to the questioning of Jesus, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Mat. 11:3). How dispirited Samuel must have felt when the people demanded a king (1 Sam. 8:4-7). Peter was greatly discouraged after he denied Jesus (Luke 22:62). The words of Paul reveal how greatly disheartened this man of God was when he defended the cross alone: “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me” (2 Tim. 4:16).

Satan seeks to discourage us in many ways. Consider the following list of responses from members of the church to the question, What discourages you more than anything else?

- Leadership failures
- Repetitive sin in people
- Mediocrity
- Personal failures
- Others failing to obey God when they know what God expects
- Not making a difference or at least feeling that I do not
- Others judging falsely

- Being treated differently
- Not able to help the lost because of trying to encourage members to be faithful
- Small-minded critics
- Negative people who never see good in people or anything
- Lack of workers in the church (10% doing the work!)
- Lack of modesty among Christians
- Brethren falsely accusing faithful brethren of being unfaithful
- My own failings; not living up to my own expectations and what I need to be
- Sin in my past that I cannot let go
- The unfaithfulness of my children
- Having to spend time away from my wife while doing the work of the church
- When I cannot fix problems for my family
- Feeling inferior; not being as good as the next person
- Members of the church who do not do anything, but complain about everything

Notice that not a single response to the question is from the extreme, but things that take place on a daily basis and that likely has been or will be a discouragement to every faithful child of God!

No greater example of discouragement can be found than in the words of Rahab, “Our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man” (Jos. 2:11). Through discouragement, Satan robs us of spiritual strength and melts our hearts so that fear reigns in our lives, but in Christ we find the strength and encouragement to overcome the disabling device of discouragement. Isaiah admonished, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and

not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31). Even when standing alone, Paul knew that the Lord was with him, strengthening him (2 Tim. 4:16–17). When Satan seeks to gain the advantage over us through discouraging words and circumstances, we need only remember that God is on our side. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31)!

Satan’s Device Of Busyness

We live in a busy world! In most families both husband and wife work outside the home. If there are children in the home, scholastic and sports activities stretch the limits of both time and patience: football, baseball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, ball practices, ball games, band practice, band competitions, tournaments, academic teams, FFA, 4-H, and HOSA just to name a few. In addition to the extracurricular activities are the practical aspects of life: cleaning the house, grocery shopping, preparing meals, tending to laundry, yard work, upkeep of the house, home improvements, buying clothes and school supplies, helping the children with homework, doctors’ visits, and tending to sick children. On a personal basis, and especially in light of the busy nature of life, we all need time for rest and relaxation, and so we add to the busyness of life family vacations, weekends at the lake, a day at the county fair, a day at the park, hunting and fishing with buddies, taking in a round of golf, a day out shopping, reading a book, or taking in a ballgame. Have you ever noticed that at the end of a restful and relaxing vacation we are more tired than when we began?

We are too busy! Our lives are filled up with things—things that are not inherently sinful, but things that keep us so busy that we are not able to do that which is most needful. Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1), but we have become too busy to pray so

that we faint. Peter instructed us to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), but we are too busy to study so we become stagnant in our spiritual growth. The Hebrews writer admonished, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25), but we are too busy to assemble with the saints so our faith becomes weak. We are too busy and Satan uses our busyness with the burdensome cares of this world (Luke 21:34) to choke us so that we become unfruitful (Mat. 13:22).

Our minds are too busy. How many hours each day are spent on technology? We check our Facebook page numerous times each day: updating our status, checking our news feed, sending or accepting friend requests, and keeping up with our friends’ daily (sometimes hourly) posts. When our tablet or smartphone alert sounds, we immediately have to read the latest news from ESPN, CNN, Fox, or the latest Tweet from the celebrities, athletes, politicians, or friends we are following. Many would begin to experience symptoms of withdrawals if they had to go more than five minutes without sending or receiving a text message. According to statistics, social networking sites have overtaken the mind of our culture: Facebook has 1.55 billion MAU (monthly active users), Instagram has 400 million, Twitter has 320 million, Skype boasts 300 million, while LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google Plus come in with a lowly 100 million each (Kapco, Snider). Snapchat, the most popular social networking site among millennials boasts 200 MAU and some seven billion videos posted per day (Snider). Paul encouraged the Philippians,

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Phi. 4:8)

But we cannot meditate on honorable thoughts and spiritual admonitions because our minds are too busy! Thinking like the world we are becoming the world.

One of our enemy's greatest and most effective devices is our own busyness. The admonition of our brother Peter is greatly to be heeded: "Be sober, be vigilant" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Conclusion

Acknowledging that an enemy exists is the first step to victory. Our enemy exists! He is "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). Satan wields a powerful influence over man and is dangerous, but in Christ we need not fear because He has gained the victory over the power of death. Speaking of Satan, Paul wrote, "We are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11); through inspired revelation we not only know our enemy exists, but we also have valuable intelligence revealing his plans, tactics, and strategies. The devil's schemes are not new; neither is his stratagem unique. He practices subterfuge seeking to exploit our weaknesses and to turn our strengths against us. Satan seeks to convince us that he is invincible, a great and terrible power, but in truth, he is little more than a Napoleon dreading the day of his Waterloo! We are a part of the army of God, the victorious army, led by the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of

God. In Jesus Christ, we gain the victory over our enemy; in Him we will overcome the evil one!

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War Stories: Learning From Battles Of The Past

Garland Elkins



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Brother Elkins is known and highly respected throughout the brotherhood. He has directed the Spiritual Sword and POWER Lectureships. He is the author of *The Savior's Way* and numerous tracts. Through the years, he has engaged in numerous debates. Presently, he serves as Dean of Public Relations at the Memphis School of Preaching

The following scriptures, plus numerous others, point out the necessity of God's people going into spiritual warfare to fight battles for and with Him: Jude 3; Psa. 78:9; and 2 Tim. 4:7 (KJV).

I wish to make certain that we understand we never have the right to boast when we serve the Lord in battle or in any capacity. Our Lord has told us: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). My favorite verse as relates to my responsibility as a preacher is "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

When I entered Freed-Hardeman College (now University), a group of brethren in the church decided to make a law of their own, contending that it was unscriptural for congregations to cooperate together in evangelism and benevolence, even though Roy Cogdill and Yater Tant had earlier been part of such efforts. In Houston, several congregations had cooperated in such efforts and Roy Cogdill wrote that it was scriptural for one congregation to host, and one congregation to pay the expenses for the use of the building. Also, many congregations supported orphan homes from the church treasuries. These men and others stated that this was unscriptural. Eventually one brother affirmed, "To take a dime out of the church treasury and feed a starving orphan would cause those who did so to spend eternity in hell." These men announced that they would push these views to the dividing of the church. Brother Yater Tant wrote, "We will wage this battle without restraint, even to the dividing of the church." That is exactly what they did even though James 1:27 reads, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." The book of James was written to the church according to James 1:1-2: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."

Several of us defended the scriptural right of the *Herald of Truth* to be sponsored by the Fifth and Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, and for other congregations to assist them in that national radio program. Cogdill, Tant, and others contended the orphan homes were in the same unscriptural position as the Missionary Society, but they could not prove such an accusation. I shall point out a few of the differences.

The Missionary Society rivals the church. The church is obligated to do her own missionary work while the Missionary Society attempts to take over the work of the church which God has given the church to do.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10-11)

The Lord adds the saved to the church, a divine institution.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. . . . Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47)

People became members of the Missionary Society, which is an unscriptural organization. The church is divine.

The *Herald of Truth* did much good for years when sound men such as James D. Wileford, E. R. Harper, George Bailey, and others preached the truth. However, sadly the time came when compromise and error began to be taught in the Fifth and Highland congregation, and some error found its way into the *Herald of Truth* radio program. The preacher, Lynn Anderson, on a Sunday said the following error: "The Church of Christ is a big sick denomination; and I mean

every one of these words: Big, sick, denomination.” On September 11, 1973, several congregations met in Memphis with Lynn Anderson and others from Fifth and Highland to discuss these matters.

Let me point out that I would oppose any error from Fifth and Highland but that would not negate the truth that sound congregations have a scriptural right to cooperate in evangelism and benevolence. One of the quibbles and misrepresentations of the anti-cooperation and the anti-orphan homes movement was that they claimed that the cooperation of congregations was unscriptural.

When we moved to Linden, Tennessee, some denominational preachers came to town and spoke on the court house lawn. I would answer them. One day, M. L. Bartholomew, from West Virginia, came and spoke. He claimed he was an apostle and could work miracles. I challenged him to a debate. The debate was six nights in the court house with W. Claude Hall defending the truth. The truth won a great victory!

The church in Linden was reestablished after forty-six years, so the “Christian Church” preacher and I had a running discussion on instrumental music on a number of occasions. A few years ago, a preacher who preached for a liberal congregation moved to Linden to preach for the “Christian Church.” A brother called me and I provided enough tracts by Guy N. Woods on instrumental music to mail to every address in that county. Very soon the “Christian Church” preacher moved to Ohio.

Soon after I began to preach, more than 67 years ago, I attended a debate in Middle Tennessee. A man was there from California. He challenged me for a debate on the role of women in the church. He taught that women could not teach children in a classroom setting, nor teach other women, and

you could not have two classes being taught at the same time. We held a four-night debate and that doctrine is rarely heard of today.

Years later, after liberalism infiltrated some congregations, I was asked by a congregation to speak on the role of women in the church, and following that to conduct an Open Forum. I did so, and some liberal women attempted to prove that they had a scriptural right to take a leadership role in the public worship of the church because the men had given them the authority to do so. I pointed out scriptures which teach that a woman usurps God's authority when she violates these scriptures. Men cannot give authority where God has not.

We moved to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and I began an extra radio program in Knoxville that had twenty-two denominational preachers speaking on the same day I spoke. One of the preachers got so upset with me, he said, "The devil is in the studio" and the next week he said, "The devil is back in the studio telling you not to send any money." He then added that he did not get a letter all week!

One Wednesday night during the Bible class, the phone rang, and one of our brethren was inviting me to come to Johnson Bible College to answer a group of denominational preachers called "The People of The Way." I went and the speaker said, "All this division is caused by the Bible." I answered him, and they walked out.

While I was a student at the University of Tennessee, I fought one battle after another. In fact, one teacher mentioned that he hated Christians. When we lived in Roanoke, Virginia, I learned of an ecumenical meeting being held in Lynchburg. I attended all three nights. While I was speaking on baptism, most of the preachers and the moderator walked out.

It is not unusual for the cornerstone in the Christian churches in Virginia to say Church of Christ, but they all

have instrumental music. On the East Coast, many of the Christian churches wear the name Church of Christ. It is very confusing when people move to the area. While in Newport News, I was trying to teach Michael Hughes the truth. He invited me to his house and had a room full of denominational preachers. I asked different ones of them to read certain scriptures. When I asked a woman preacher to read a scripture on baptism, she closed her Bible and said, "I see what you are doing." She left, but I am glad to say that Michael was baptized.

While I preached at Getwell, Rubel Shelley and 49 other ministers for the churches of Christ met with 50 Christian Church preachers in Joplin, Missouri. They were going to discuss unity. I got permission from brother Guy N. Woods to reprint brother Boles' tract on *Unity of "Christian Churches" and Churches of Christ*. We quickly got the tract reprinted, and brother and sister Crockett drove all night to get the tract into that meeting. When they arrived, they were refused admittance. Brother Crockett found one speaker who took it in the meeting, but the tracts were soon taken away. The tracts are free today.

Several years ago in Memphis, I was invited to speak on the TV program entitled, *What is Your Faith?* The Methodist moderator became upset with me, threw up his hands, and said, "Mr. Elkins, do not quote any more Scripture." I answered him with a Scripture.

While I was the preacher at Getwell, the Collinsville, Oklahoma church withdrew from a member who was having an affair and refused to repent. This became national news, and Phil Donahue requested the Collinsville elders to send a representative to be on his TV program and defend the Bible teaching on church discipline. I was humbled to be selected. I went and I hope much good was accomplished.

Time will not permit me to continue, but I want to mention that more than 50 years ago an Exodus movement went to New York to establish the church. DeWayne Evans was the minister, and he thought that if he did not have success on one street corner the Holy Spirit would direct him to go to another. There he would have success. That teaching helped promote the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Faithful brethren, including me, opposed that error. However, brethren would not be warned.

Following are two things that happened in my preaching career that were noteworthy: The first one began when I moderated for brother Harold Sain in a debate with Mr. Albert Batts of a holiness cult. The debate was conducted at the church of Christ at Morrison, Tennessee. Brother Sain was the father of David and Paul, both outstanding gospel preachers. Following the debate, I preached in a gospel meeting. We had 92 to respond, 46 baptisms, and 46 restorations.

The second one was when I debated Bob Ross in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Basically the topic discussed was the Necessity of Baptism for Remission of Sins versus the Baptist error of Salvation by Faith Alone. I was told there were more than 20 baptisms following the debate. To God be the glory.

We have many present battles to fight. For example, some congregations have removed the name Church of Christ, added instrumental music, and even started using women in their public worship service. They now use the name *Community Church*.

Other problems facing the church include homosexuality, abortion, marriage, divorce and remarriage, and the Crossroads Movement. A few years ago, brother James D. Bales came up with the view that the law of marriage did not

apply to the alien sinner. I oppose that error and we had the discussion at the Harding Graduate School.

May we all put on the whole armor of God and continue to defend the truth.

Armageddon

Wesley Simons



Wesley was born October 2, 1945 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is a graduate of Red Bank High School in Chattanooga. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching (1972). He holds a BA degree from Tennessee Bible College and an MA degree in Christian Doctrine & Apologetics from Tennessee Bible College. He has been preaching 46 years. He has served churches in Virginia and Tennessee. He is currently in his twenty-fourth year with the Stoney Creek Church of Christ in Elizabethton, TN. He has started two brotherhood papers. He has had debates on the Godhead, baptism, instrumental music, and Catholicism. He has preached on various radio and TV programs. He has done work for WVBS. He is the Director of the Tri-Cities School of Preaching and Christian Development. He was married to the former Elva May Cook (deceased) of Luray, Virginia. They have two children: Karen Blevins and Candy Phillips (deceased) [both are/were faithful members of the Lord's church]. They have one granddaughter—Brandi Turner. Wesley is currently married to the former Kay Annette Roll.

If one tunes into a religious program today, he will not have to listen very long until he hears about the battle of Armageddon. One would think that this battle is mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible. However, such is not the case. The battle is mentioned only once in God's Word: "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (KJV, Rev. 16:16). The religious leaders have taken the book of Revelation that people know very little

about and built a host of false doctrines. We must realize that the book of Revelation is highly figurative.

We need to keep in mind a principle in hermeneutics: no figurative language is to eliminate or override that which is spelled out in plain, clear-cut language. The religious world forgets this principle. They do it to their own destruction.

It is amazing how men can take a verse out of its context and time frame and teach such a deadly doctrine as premillennialism. Every time a conflict arises in the Middle East, someone declares this is “it,” the very thing that will lead up to the great battle of Armageddon. In the early 1990s, when the Gulf War was being fought, various preachers were declaring this is “it,” the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. We knew they were wrong and asked if they would apologize for teaching error once the war was over. However, they did not and would not apologize.

The Place Of The Battle

One might ask, What is the significance of the Megiddo Valley? Well, the rough terrain in that area did not allow many places where armies could do battle. This valley is also known as the Valley of Jezreel and the Esdraelon Valley. It is about 20 miles long and about 14 miles wide. How can one envision billions and billions of people being placed in such a small area to fight the battle of Armageddon? There are about seven billion people on the Earth today. Can you imagine trying to place all of them into the Megiddo Valley? There would be no room to fight. Such is the mind-set of false teachers. They are selling books on their science-fiction views of the book of Revelation and making millions off the ignorance of men.

Many decisive battles were fought here. The encounter of Deborah and Barak winning over the Canaanites took place

here (Jud. 5). Good King Josiah was killed fighting against the Egyptians (2 Kin. 23). Nearby Gilboa was where Saul and his three sons were killed by the Philistines (2 Sam. 21).

The Time Frame Of The Battle

Whatever the battle is must fit into the time frame given by Revelation. We are handcuffed by that time frame. Notice the time frame set by the Holy Spirit: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants **things which must shortly come to pass**; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1; emphasis WS), and “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: **for the time is at hand**” (Rev. 1:3; emphasis WS). John also states: “And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the **time is at hand**” (Rev. 22:10; emphasis WS). Any interpretation of the battle that ignores the aforementioned verses is false.

To project the battle of Armageddon two thousand years or more into the future is to miss the context of the book of Revelation. We must look at the book through first-century eyes. If we fail to do this, we will be confused.

The Weapons Of The Battle

In this great battle, the premillennialists see guns, helicopters, atomic bombs, missiles, tanks, poisonous gases, etc. What would these things have meant to the seven churches of Asia? What would they have meant to anyone reading this material in the first-century?

Paul said the weapons of our warfare are not carnal:

For though we walk in the flesh, we
do not war after the flesh: (For the

weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

Christians do not fight with guns, helicopters, atomic bombs, etc. We must fight with the armor that God has given us:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph. 6:11-17)

God does not need our help to fight a physical battle against evil. God has the awesome power to destroy an evil world with a flood (Gen. 6-8). He has the ability to open the earth and swallow the ungodly (Num. 16). God used one angel to smite 185,000 Assyrians in one night (2 Kin. 19:35). Our warfare is not carnal. We are in a spiritual warfare.

False Doctrine Concerning The Battle Of Armageddon

Some believe that Jesus came to Earth the first time to set up an earthly kingdom. However, they state that what Jesus did not know and what God did not know was that the Jews were going to reject Him as king. It amazes this author that one would build a doctrine on the ignorance of the godhead. What an insult to the all-knowing God. Consider what Isaiah said: “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa. 46:10). Therefore, God is an all-knowing God. Otherwise, He is deficient of one of His attributes.

The Jews tried to force Jesus to be an earthly king, but He refused the job. “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:15). Jesus said: “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36). The true kingdom of Christ is within one: “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). When one obeys from the heart, he is born again and added to this kingdom: “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

The premillennialists also state that Israel is still God's people. They contend that they were restored as a nation in 1948. They declare that the Roman Empire has to be restored so that the teachings of Daniel 2 will be accurate. They realize that the kingdom would be established during the reign of the Roman Empire. As mentioned already, they believe Christ came to set up an earthly kingdom, but they contend that the Jews rejected that effort. Therefore, Christ had to do the second best thing by establishing His church. The Bible, on the other hand, declares the church to be in the eternal purpose of God: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11). The Bible also affirms that the church and the kingdom are one and the same:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mat. 16:18-19)

As they continue with their false view of the battle of Armageddon, they bring the restored kingdom of Rome into conflict with Israel. At first, Rome makes a treaty with Israel and all is well for about 3½ years. However, after the 3½ years, the treaty is broken. This according to them is when the great tribulation occurs. This is their view of Matthew 24. Most

believe that just before the great tribulation, the children of God will be raptured out of this world. They will remain up in the air with the Christ until the 3½ years of tribulation is over. They affirm that Christ will come back to Earth with all the righteous. The resurrection of both good and bad will occur. The evil forces will take on the good forces lead by the Christ. They will meet in the Megiddo Valley and the battle of Armageddon will occur. All who have ever lived will fight a physical warfare. The battle will be so fierce that the blood will run up to the bridle of the horse's mouth: "And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (Rev. 14:20).

We could stand people shoulder to shoulder in the Megiddo Valley and drain all of their blood and it would not reach the depth of the horse's bridle. This is figurative language to show the fierceness of the battle.

According to teachers of premillennialism, Christ and His force win the Battle of Armageddon. At that time, their doctrine says that Christ will set up His literal kingdom and rule for a literal thousand years seated upon the literal throne of David in the literal city of Jerusalem. They state that the temple will be rebuilt and that animal sacrifices will be offered again. This slaps Jesus in the face for He is the perfect Lamb of God who came to die for the sins of the world (John 1:29; John 3:16; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:1-2).

After Jesus reigns on Earth for one thousand years, He will take the redeemed to heaven with Him. All of the evil people are punished in a devil's hell forever and ever. The premillennialists have three comings of Christ. They have three resurrections and three judgments.

The Bible teaches two comings of Christ, one resurrection, and one Judgment. The Hebrew writer states:

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). This is also affirmed by John:

Marvel not at this: for the **hour** is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:28-29; emphasis WS)

Their Sugar Stick Concerning The Battle

These false teachers flock to Revelation 20, thinking they have found all of their teaching. This chapter is not their friend. As a matter of fact, it exposes their false doctrine. The first six verses state:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and

which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Rev. 20:1-6)

Did you notice that these verses did not mention the second coming, Christ on earth, David's throne, us, Jerusalem, the temple, animal sacrifices, and a host of other things the premillennialists need to prove their doctrine? Those who are going to reign with Christ are those who have been beheaded for His cause. This reminds us of the souls under the altar:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their

fellowservants also and their brethren,
that should be killed as they were, should
be fulfilled. (Rev. 6:9-11)

Those who teach a literal thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth cannot find one verse that puts Christ upon this Earth at the second coming. They cannot find Him upon the literal throne of David here on Earth. Furthermore, they cannot find a kingdom that is to be set up in the future. As a matter of fact, Jesus is going to deliver up the kingdom at His second coming, not set up a kingdom:

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (1 Cor. 15:24-27)

The Bible teaches that the kingdom is here. False teachers go to the book of Revelation to show that the Battle of Armageddon precedes the establishment of the kingdom. However, the author declared that he is in the kingdom: "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:9). This harmonizes

beautifully with the words of Jesus: “And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). The question is, did Jesus tell the truth? Sure, He did!!! When one is born again, he enters the kingdom: “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The people at Colosse were added to the kingdom: “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13).

Revelation Twenty Continues To Expose The False Teachers

They have a major problem with Revelation 20 fitting into the mold of the battle of Armageddon as they teach. The first six verses destroyed their Christ-reigning-one-thousand-years-on-Earth theory. Now watch what these verses do to that theory:

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake

of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Rev. 20:7-10)

If verses one through six of this Revelation 20 tell of the great victory that took place at the battle of Armageddon, as taught by the premillennialists, how can the aforementioned verses be true? Notice the facts from these verses: Satan is loosed, nations still exist, and other great battles will be fought in the future. How can these things be true if the earthly battle of Armageddon was fought and won by Christ and His forces? According to the premillennial theory, if Satan and all of his evil forces were totally destroyed, how could these nations have survived? Also, there is a period of time that exceeds the thousand year reign. Where does this period of time fit into their time frame? They cannot make it work.

What we see in Revelation 20 is the resurrection of a cause. This is the same principle as Ezekiel 37. Judea was in captivity and it looked like their cause was dead. However, there was a valley of dry bones. The bones took on muscle and then skin and arose to live again. This was the cause of the Jews (God) being resurrected. So it is in the book of Revelation. The church was under such great persecution it looked like what the prophets had stated in the Old Testament had failed. Revelation 20 shows the resurrection of the cause of Christ (the church).

Truth Concerning The Battle

The battle is between God and Satan. It has been going on since the Garden of Eden here on this earth. The characters have changed through the years. In the first-century, the

battle was between the church and the Roman government. The Caesars wanted to be viewed as deity. They demanded worship. Christians would not and could not participate in such. We see the various kings or Caesars mentioned in chapter seventeen:

And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. (Rev. 17:7-11)

The book was written while one of the kings (Caesars) is still reigning: "One is" (Rev. 17:10). This writer is convinced that this is Vespasian. Titus would follow him; then, after his rule would be Domitian. Domitian's reign ushered in the

great persecution of the church. Members of the church had to make a choice between God or Caesar. If one chose Caesar, he would be taking the mark of the beast. Thus would be lost:

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. (Rev. 19:20)

Christians were called upon to be faithful to God. They were to be overcomers (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:26; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 3:21; Rev. 21:7). The battle was between the church and the Roman Empire. Therefore, it was depicted as a battle or war. Christians were to keep their garments clean while fighting this battle:

For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. (Rev. 16:14-16)

The battle is spoken of here, but it takes place in chapter nineteen:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make

war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh. (Rev. 19:11-21)

Two great suppers are mentioned in Revelation 19. One is the marriage feast of those who were faithful to God. Thus, they had won the battle of Armageddon. The other was a feast for the fowl of the air. The buzzards would feed upon the flesh of the losers. This shows that there is victory in Christ. Even those who were slain for the cause of Christ would reign with Him (Rev. 20:1-6).

The thousand-year reign in Revelation 20 was a respite from persecution. However, when the thousand-year reign was over, persecution would arise again. The illustration of Gog and Magog was to demonstrate that other battles were coming. Therefore, if the saints would be faithful to God, the outcome would be the same: victory in Christ. John put it this way:

And when the thousand years are expired,
Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
And shall go out to deceive the nations
which are in the four quarters of the earth,

Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Rev. 20:7-10)

Conclusion

We can win any and all battles if we are faithful to God. We might become discouraged. However, we must remember in Christ we have victory. How did they win? John told us: “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev. 12:11). We must trust in the blood of Christ and the power which lies in His Word for total victory. We must also be willing to die for the cause of Christ.

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Special Forces

Parents: The Front Line

Kevin Ruiz



Kevin Ruiz is a native of southern Florida. He began preaching in 1990 and is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. Upon graduation from preaching school, Kevin worked with Truth for the World. He has done local work in Tennessee, Wyoming, and Texas. He is working with the Eastside congregation in Maryville, Tennessee. He has been blessed with the opportunity to do gospel meetings, lectureships, and campaign work in several states and foreign countries. He also produces a weekly internet radio program, *Light Has Dawned*, heard on the Gospel Radio Network. Kevin is married to Courtney, and together they have three daughters and one son.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed, But shall
speak with their enemies in the gate.
(NKJV, Psa. 127:3–5)

Indeed, the children with which our Father has blessed us are a gift. They are precious souls born in innocence into a world full of darkness and difficulties of all sorts. These souls must be trained to “choose life” (Deu. 30:19) and be prepared to wrestle against “the rulers of the darkness of this age” (Eph. 6:12).

Our children possess immortal souls and will, thus, eternally inhabit either Heaven or Hell. God has given to us parents the tremendous responsibility of training our children to know God, love God, and faithfully serve God so that they will be ready to face the Lord in judgment. No amount of training, however, will prove effective if we do not model before our children the values we seek to instill in them. How many souls have turned from the truth because of the hypocrisy they have observed within the lives of those who claim to follow Christ. Instead, we must have the mindset of Ezra the priest (Ezra 7:10) and seek out God's Word, do it, and teach it to the precious souls He has entrusted to our care.

Of Abraham, the Lord said,

For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.
(Gen. 18:19)

Notice that the fulfilment of the promises God made to Abraham, including the inheritance of a land flowing with milk and honey (Gen. 13:14-15; Exo. 3:8), was conditioned upon his descendants keeping the way of the Lord—and Abraham was responsible for commanding them to do so! Our “land of promise” is the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13) and in which there are many mansions (John 14:2). But if our children and grandchildren are going to have any hope of such a bright and blessed future, we, like Abraham, must teach them to “keep the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19). Did not the Spirit

command us regarding our children to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) and require fathers to take the lead in this effort?

In the congregations with which you have worshiped over the years, how many families have lost children “brought up in the church” to worldliness, liberalism, denominationalism, agnosticism, or atheism? Indeed, our “adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). And he will not spare or have mercy upon our children.

Remember, the primary responsibility of preparing children to be faith-filled and steadfast Christians rests upon parents—we are the “home front” in this spiritual battle. During WWII and prior conflicts, the civilian population in the United States served as the Home Front to the war effort. The National WWII Museum explains.

The Home Front is the name given to the activities of the civilians when their nation is at war. Life on the Front during WWII was a significant part of the war effort for all Americans and had a major impact on the outcome of the war. Millions of new jobs were created to support the military; as a result, there was a large scale migration to industrial centers. A rationing system was started in the United States to help conserve the limited number of resources—particularly food, rubber, and steel.

Families were encouraged to recycle needed materials like waste fats (for explosives) and scrap metal. Increased

industrial activity meant millions of women were needed in factories for the first time. African Americans also gained opportunities to find good paying war work. Movies, radio programs (there was no TV yet), songs, and even comic books often had WWII themes during WWII. Posters encouraged Americans to support the war effort by buying war bonds, rationing, growing their own food in Victory gardens, enlisting in the military, and not spreading rumors about the war. The mood of the country was captured well with the slogan, “*We’re All in This Together!*” (Life on the Home Front)

As Christians, we are a holy nation at war with Satan and his angels (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 6:10-12). As Christian parents, we support this war effort by teaching our children to think like Jesus, live like Jesus, and be willing to suffer like Jesus—all in an effort to prepare them to begin and maintain an active part in the “good fight” after which they will lay hold of eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12). Such efforts require much time, planning, sacrifice, and diligence. Surely our love for our children will move us to embrace this vital work and do everything within our power to protect and prepare for the Lord’s service the cherished souls that are our heritage from the Lord!

Thinking Like Jesus

The importance of developing the inner qualities of our children cannot be overstated. Cultivating Christ-like character in their lives is foundational to our efforts to direct

them through the narrow gate that leads to life (Mat. 7:13-14). The aim is to bring up children who do not simply go through the motions but who, instead, possess the inner virtues and spirit which make their external actions praiseworthy before God. Also, godly hearts protect against worldly lives (Mark 7:21-23).

There are so many qualities to develop within our children—qualities of a spiritual nature as were seen in the life of Jesus. Paul, by the Spirit, wrote,

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phi. 2:5-8)

The humble and obedient heart of Christ, seen in His faithful submission to the will of the Father, is that perfect model after which we must seek to mold the hearts and minds of our children. Humility will enable our children to see and acknowledge their sins and help them avoid the pitfall of pride which God hates (Pro. 16:18; Pro. 6:16-17). Humility is key to having the heart of a servant and is exemplified in Jesus' own obedience, even to the point of death. Children must learn obedience, for, where it is lacking, trouble is certain to follow.

Nearly twenty years ago, I volunteered to serve as a mentor for a local South Texas elementary school and, one

day, passed several classrooms as I made my way down the hall. Ahead of me, I noticed a student lying on the floor, blocking the entrance to a classroom. A teacher scolded the boy, who looked to be about 10 years old, and insisted that he get up and cooperate. He paid no attention to her words. Having no respect and no fear of consequences, he defiantly refused to comply. Examples such as this remind us of what the Spirit led Agur to write, “The eye that mocks his father, And scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it” (Pro. 30:17). Will a child who does not even obey his parents be submissive to teachers, governments, and other authority figures—including God? At a very young age, children will test just how weighty the words of their parents are. And parents, when they allow their children to go unpunished for repeatedly ignoring their instructions, teach their children that obedience is optional—a lesson that will yield bitter fruit. “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Pro. 29:15). Consider additional instructions to parents: “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pro. 13:24) and “Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell” (Pro. 23:13–14).

As children are taught to obey, they must also be taught to do so with the right attitude. Consider the psalmist’s words:

Make me walk in the path of Your
commandments, For I delight in it.
Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And
not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes
from looking at worthless things, And

revive me in Your way. Establish Your word to Your servant, Who is devoted to fearing You. Turn away my reproach which I dread, For Your judgments are good. Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me in Your righteousness. (Psa. 119:35–40)

Delighting in and longing for the good Will of God insures that our obedience is rendered gladly, not grudgingly. Children should be taught this godly attitude toward submission from the very beginning and not be allowed to gripe, whine, or complain—the very attitude for which the children of Israel incurred the wrath of God (Num. 11:1).

The quality of diligence is another important Christ-like trait that children must be taught. Sadly, many young people today are given to the constant indulgence in pleasures. Free time is spent consuming hour upon hour of entertainment media, video games, social media, and more. CNN’s Kelly Wallace writes,

You probably won’t be surprised to hear that a new report found that teens and tweens spend a lot of time watching TV, videos and movies, playing video games, reading, listening to music and checking social media, but you might be somewhat shocked (I was!) by just how much time.

On any given day, teens in the United States spend about nine hours using media for their enjoyment, according to the report by Common Sense Media, a nonprofit focused on helping children,

parents and educators navigate the world of media and technology.

Let's just put nine hours in context for a second. That's more time than teens typically spend sleeping, and more time than they spend with their parents and teachers. And the nine hours does not include time spent using media at school or for their homework.

How can our children possibly develop a strong work ethic, much less a spiritually-centered life, if they are allowed to spend anywhere near such spans of time on pleasures? Jesus warned, "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). Pleasures often serve as snares used by Satan to shift one's focus from the pursuits that bring eternal life to the pursuits that bring temporary enjoyment. And human beings, being weak in the exercise of self-restraint, often allow such pleasures to become excessive. The apostle Paul wrote of perilous times in which, among other things, men would become "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). Young Jesus, at age twelve, was already of the mindset that He needed to be busy with work. When Joseph and Mary found Jesus after an anxious search, He asked, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Additionally, Paul reminds us, in his words to bondservants, how to properly approach all work: "And **whatever** you do, **do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men**, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24; emphasis KR).

Building Christ-like character will not be neglected if we strive to grow the fruit of the Spirit within the hearts of our children (Gal. 5:22-23). And how enriched their souls will be when we prayerfully labor to help them learn and live the glorious attributes of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7)! If our heart's longing is that our children become more like God and escape the spiritual defilement of yielding to lusts (2 Pet. 1:4), then we would do well to hear and heed Peter's admonition:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-11)

Whatever the cost, whatever the effort required, we must give our all to sowing the seeds of godly character within our children's hearts. Thinking like Jesus serves as a bedrock

foundation for a child's continued spiritual growth and leads to that abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

Living Like Jesus

As we teach our children to have the mind of Christ, we must, simultaneously, train them to emulate the conduct of Christ. From an early age, children can learn that we live to please God and strive to be like Jesus. They must also understand that failure is a part of the growth process and that we—and God—will always love them and help them do better. The process involves consistent teaching, discipline, patience, encouragement, and understanding. The necessary rigorous requirements of conformation to family rules may yield the appearance of progress when children comply, but equally essential is a spirit of love, understanding, and gentleness undergirding all such discipline so that compliance is genuine and heartfelt, not merely resentfully given. Parents may be so harsh and heavy handed as to create feelings of discouragement and even hostility in children. “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col. 3:21; see also Eph. 6:4). I am not suggesting that parents be soft on disobedience or unacceptable behavior but, simply, that the correction and guidance given be administered in such a way as to cause children to understand that they are being disciplined because they are deeply loved and cherished by their parents, an approach which will help them respond properly to the correction (cf. Heb. 12:5-11). Praise and encouragement should also be a regular part of the training process, cheering our children's hearts and inspiring continued efforts at improvement.

Jesus lived to do His Father's will. He lived under the Law of Moses and fully understood and followed that law.

Returning to Luke's account of Jesus' boyhood, we learn what Joseph and Mary observed when they finally located Jesus.

Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. (Luke 2:46-47)

Though our children are mere mortals, they can be taught to develop a great interest in God's Word from which they can acquire knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Children are capable of learning great sums of Bible facts, memorizing Scripture, and comprehending biblical truths, if only we will lead them in this most valuable pursuit. Bible stories in their early years, daily family devotional time, and spiritual discussions whenever opportunity arises all contribute to the effort of helping our children to live like Jesus.

God's revelation to Moses regarding parental responsibility for children's spiritual education remains a model for all who seek Divine guidance on this matter:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets

between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deu. 6:6-9)

This picture is one of continual instruction, discussion, and contemplation of God's Word. Visual reminders were also used by God's people to keep His will ever before them and present in their families' hearts. To prepare our children to live like Jesus, with spiritual strength and unwavering faith, should we not reflect upon and commit to practicing this remarkable divine directive of old that will unquestionably enrich the families who apply its principles to their lives under the new covenant today (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)?

With God's Word in their hearts and before their eyes, our children can see how to live like Jesus in regard to temptation. They will learn that they must deny themselves and follow the Father's will just as Jesus did when He refused Satan's advances and turned to the written Word for the truth He never forsook (Mat. 4:1-11). As children mature and begin the struggle against sin, hope will come to their hearts when they learn of the Lord's supporting role: "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18).

Mark recorded Christ's words when addressing another matter in which parents must train their children to live like Jesus—servitude. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus served humanity by teaching them God's will, rebuking their sin, healing their sick, and sacrificing His life. Jesus served both multitudes and individuals, even when He was weary (John 4:6-26). Jesus taught His disciples that true greatness is found in service (Mat. 20:25-27). In a society where self-centeredness is commonplace, our children need

to learn to live like Jesus and to serve others. Physical needs, spiritual needs, and struggles of various sorts all provide opportunities to serve our fellow man. As Paul commanded, so let us instruct our children,

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phi. 2:3-4)

As we direct our children in the footsteps of the Savior, we must show them how the Lord also serves as a pattern for opposing error. False teaching causes souls to be lost. Jesus, therefore, was unrelenting in His battle against the destructive teachings of His adversaries. He exposed their blatant violations of the commands of God (Mat. 15:1-9). He shined the light of truth on their hypocritical ways (Mat. 23:1-36). Our children must learn that faithfulness to God necessitates a strong stand against error (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12). Threats against the church will continue to come from both without and within, as they always have. We must raise up a generation equipped to face the advances of error, by wielding the Sword of the Spirit and wearing the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-17).

Suffering Like Jesus

Sometimes, as parents, we wish our little ones could remain small and free from the pain, burdens, and suffering that life brings. They grow up, nonetheless, and must face the harsh realities of living in this world of troubles. Our work as parents includes helping our children understand how to

deal with suffering in life. For them to be strong and faithful soldiers of the cross who achieve victory through Jesus, they must be prepared for suffering and must persevere through it. The life of a soldier necessarily involves suffering. The Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10), the One who enlisted us as Christian soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4), did Himself suffer greatly at the hands of wicked men. As a compassionate teacher, Jesus prepared His disciples for the fact that they, too, would be both hated and persecuted:

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:18-21)

Despite the certainty of Christian suffering (2 Tim. 3:12), Jesus taught that joy can be found in suffering, tying suffering to the hope of certain reward.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely

for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mat. 5:10–12)

The apostle Paul, in like manner, addressed the matter of suffering when he wrote of his request for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. The Lord did not grant Paul's request, but the apostle noted both the Lord's response and the lesson he learned:

And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9–10)

When preparing our children for the reality of suffering in the Christian life, let us be sure to remind them of the great reward that comes to those who persevere, the strength to be gained in the process, and the Savior who will always be present (Mat. 28:20) and never forsake His people (Heb. 13:5).

The precious souls God has placed in our care will move through various stages of life and will, one day, leave home. Training our children to think like Jesus, live like Jesus, and suffer like Jesus will aid them in their journey toward dwelling eternally with Him. As John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). May

the Lord help us etch upon the hearts of our own children the teachings of our great God so

[t]hat the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children, That they may set their hope in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments. (Psalm 78:6-7)

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

The Tongue

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It is a distinct honor to be invited to appear on this fine lectureship. My deepest appreciation is expressed to those planning this wonderful study of God's Word.

We have all brought a weapon of mass destruction with us today. It is dangerous and destructive. If such were announced to this assembly, fear would grip our hearts. This weapon is concealed. It is behind our lips and teeth. It is the tongue! It is used as a weapon of destruction by so many. There is no way to measure the many problems this weapon brings into the lives of others. James, the inspired writer, records these challenging words: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (NKJV, Jam. 1:26). True religion involves the proper use of the tongue. James says we are to be "swift to hear, slow to speak" (Jam. 1:19). Words quickly and carelessly spoken can be devastating to others. Again, James reminds us that one is

to “so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (Jam. 2:12). Jesus warned that “every idle word men may speak they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mat. 12:36-37). We will be judged by our words! They will either justify or condemn us! We must be very careful how we speak! The careless use of our tongues is a danger we must always guard against. The Psalmist wrote: “Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit” (Psa. 34:12-13). The apostle Peter quoted this verse in his first Epistle (1 Pet. 3:10). Days may be filled with either joy or heartache by the use of our tongues!

The text for this lesson is found in James 3:1-12. Three powerful truths about the tongue are discovered in these verses. These help us to understand why we must guard our speech and tame our tongues!

The Tongue Is Perilous

The tongue is a *perilous* thing. It has brought great challenges to all. James warned those who desire to “become teachers” (Jam. 3:1). It is strange to us that such warning is given. The church is always in need of more teachers. Yet, James says: “Let not many of you become teachers” (Jam. 3:1). Not many? We wonder why. It is possible that one may have an inordinate desire to become a teacher. The honor associated with standing before others and teaching could create a certain “pride” which would be wrong. Jesus spoke scathing words of condemnation to the scribes and Pharisees of His day.

The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’
seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to

observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works, for they say, and do not do . . . They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogue, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. (Mat. 23:1-2; Mat. 23:6-7)

Was it wrong in Jesus' day for one to be a Rabbi? Not at all. Jesus was recognized a great Rabbi or teacher (Mat. 23:8; Mat. 23:10). It was the proud attitude one possessed as a teacher which was so perilous. For that reason, one should be very careful about desiring to be a teacher. The context might help us understand the perils of being a teacher. James said, "We shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jam. 3:1). Why? Those who teach imply they have greater knowledge. With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility. Greater responsibility results in stricter judgment! One must "practice what he teaches." It is not enough to tell others what **they** should do if the one teaching does not show by his example that he lives his message before others. Of Jesus it is written He "began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Jesus was the true embodiment of His message. Paul admonished the Corinthians: "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). Christians are to be living epistles! How we live our message speaks loudly to those who hear what we say! We must also remember that what we teach others must be applied to ourselves. This principle is seen in Paul's words of inspiration written in his letter to the saints at Rome. He wrote:

Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,

and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say 'do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? (Rom. 2:17-23)

What a challenge Paul provides to those who teach! The same standard the teacher applies to others must also be applied to the one teaching! It is perilous to one who does not make personal the message he wants others to follow!

Another reason one should be careful about becoming a teacher is noted in the perils of **what** one teaches. How the tongue is used in conveying the lesson is a great challenge! The tongue may be used in teaching truth. Indeed, such is the responsibility of any teacher. He is to teach the truth which sets men free (John 8:32). This truth is found in the **only** source of divine truth: the inspired, inerrant Word of God (John 17:17). Paul challenged the young preacher, Timothy:

Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For

the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

Those responsible for preaching and teaching must understand that the message will not always be accepted by the listeners. It will become easy to “water down” the truth. In an age of “political correctness,” it will be a constant challenge to never compromise the Word of God! The examples of Jesus and His apostles encourage us to always be willing to declare an unwavering message of truth! False teaching is perilous, for it cannot save! When one teaches error, he leads people **away** from the truth. He brings confusion and condemnation to his hearers. There is always a danger and peril in the way teachers use their speech as they share their lessons with others. We must ever be reminded of the need to speak truth with the proper attitude. Paul encouraged in these words: “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). When one teaches, he must avoid the constant peril of a wrong spirit behind the truth spoken! The beautiful attitude of Paul is seen as he writes: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi. 3:18). The truth was being challenged by those of whom Paul wrote, and such brought tears to his eyes! A heart of compassion must accompany the message spoken by faithful teachers. The perilous use of the tongue is also identified in what one may say concerning God. How often God is accused of doing things He does not do! For example, a person might say, Why did God do this to me?

It might be a tragedy. It could be a personal problem. It may be an illness. God is then spoken against because of the “bad things” which come into a person’s life. The false notion of God being involved in things which are wrong in a person’s life is a tragic misunderstanding. We must remember that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17). Only good comes from God! Nothing that is bad or wrong in one’s life may be attributed to God. To say otherwise is wrong and perilous! James further wrote: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (Jam. 1:13). The improper use of the tongue in blaming God for all the problems of one’s life is tragic and wrong. Another peril of the tongue identified in the book of James is found in the second chapter. Here we read of how we may become guilty of showing partiality and favoritism. He wrote of a rich and poor man coming into the assembly of the saints. We are warned against what we “say” to these visitors to the worship service. Notice what James wrote: “You pay attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there, or, ‘Sit here at my footstool’” (Jam. 2:3). Our prejudices and partiality may express themselves in what we “say” to the rich or the poor!

Another incorrect use of the tongue identified by James is seen in the following words: “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast” (Jam. 3:14). The proud promotion of self and selfish ambitions create division within the church. James stated: “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there” (Jam. 3:16). The perils of the boastful tongue have brought so much division into the church! The tongue may also speak of

plans which leave God out. James recorded: “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit” (Jam. 4:13). The tongue is saying things which one cannot know for sure. One does not “know what will happen tomorrow” (Jam. 4:14). In the proper use of our tongues we “ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (Jam. 4:15). We must use our tongues by a recognition of the Lord in all our plans! We are saying, The Lord has control and I must be in submission to His will. Any other attitude will lead one to “boast in . . . arrogance. All such boasting is evil” (Jam. 4:16). James has so much to say in warning against the perils of the tongue!

The perils of the tongue are also identified in the book of Proverbs. The wise man enumerates

six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him; a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. (Pro. 6:16-19)

Note, three of the seven things God hates are identified with the improper use of the tongue. They are a lying tongue, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. Those things God hates should cause one to turn from and hate them. In Proverbs 7 we read of the tempting words of a harlot. In graphic detail the wise man records the alluring words spoken to the “young man devoid of understanding” (Pro. 7:7). Of this immoral woman it is

recorded: “With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him” (Pro. 7:21). The tongue is indeed perilous in the way it may be used to lead others into sin!

The perils of the tongue are observed in how it reveals the heart. Jesus stated clearly: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). The words we speak reveal what is within us. It is perilous to fill the heart with impurity, for our tongues will speak what lies deep within us! The wise man wrote in the long ago: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Pro. 4:23). It is also true that out of the heart spring the words we speak! James encourages his readers to “purify your hearts” (Jam. 4:8). In the very next verse we read, “Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you” (Pro. 4:24). The heart and the tongue are tied together!

The Power Of The Tongue

Secondly, we must understand the *power* of the tongue. Contemplate what the tongue has done. Tongues have begun wars. Homes have been destroyed by speech. Our words have brought great suffering to others. Such a small member of the body is capable of doing greater damage than one can imagine. To see how one is to control the power of the tongue, James used three illustrations. He wrote of the bit placed in the horse’s mouth (Jam. 3:3). That small piece of metal in the horse’s mouth helps the rider to control the whole body of the powerful horse! If the bit is not in place, the horse may run uncontrollably! A second illustration demonstrating how to control the tongue is the rudder at the back of the ship. The small rudder allows the pilot to guide the ship through the

waters (Jam. 3:4). Again, without the rudder, the ship may travel with no direction. The third illustration which reveals the control of the tongue is the little fire. A small spark may cause a blaze which consumes hundreds of acres of land or forests. Only a few words will cause a fire to spread! A rumor may spread out of control. A bit of gossip spoken to the inquiring ears of others may burn uncontrollably. People are destroyed. James urges his readers to “not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (Jam. 4:11). Like fires burning out of control, words may get out of control and do much damage! James reaches into hell, gehenna, to show the origin of this fire of speech (Jam. 3:6). It is from the satanic realm that all ungodly and improper speech originates! In Proverbs 16:1, we read: “The answer of the tongue is from the Lord.” The proper use of our tongues is always guided by God. When we use our tongues in the wrong way, we may be sure that we allow Satan to influence us. The tongue and our speech are indeed so very difficult to control. The use of the bit in the horse’s mouth, the rudder of the ship, and the small fire remind us of the constant need to recognize the difficulty in controlling the power of our tongues! It is compared to how even wild animals have been tamed (Jam. 3:7). How ironic that men may bring the beasts of the earth and fish of the sea into control, and yet cannot tame the “beast of the tongue.” It may be an “unruly evil” (Jam. 3:8). It is true that “no man can tame the tongue” (Jam. 3:8). It is such a powerful thing that without the Lord’s strength, man finds it impossible to completely control it.

The Potential Of The Tongue

The third and final point James speaks of in reminding us of the tongue is noted in the *potential* of the tongue. What

can the tongue do? The tongue may worship God! It can sing His praises (Eph. 5:19). It may speak words of encouragement to others as we worship in song. We use our tongues in talking to God in prayer (1 The. 5:17). The tongue has the potential to bless or curse. It is sad to hear some “bless and praise God” and then go out and curse those made in the image of God (Jam. 3:9-10). The tongue has the potential to create or destroy. Families, the church, and the nation may either be built up or destroyed by our speech! The proper use of the tongue has the potential to **change** lives! No greater use of the tongue is imagined than this! One may use his tongue to share the gospel (Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:16). The tongue may be used to restore the erring (Gal. 6:1-2; Jam. 5:19-20). The words we speak may comfort the bereaved (1 The. 4:18). Our speech may strengthen those weak and struggling in life. The potential of the tongue is clearly stated in the words of wisdom: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Pro. 18:21). We may bring death or life with our tongues! Is there greater potential than this? The potential of our tongues is also seen in how it may be used to overcome anger. In Proverbs 15:1 we read: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” and “a gentle tongue breaks a bone” (Pro. 25:15). The potential of the tongue to change the whole atmosphere of a difficult situation should cause us to seek wisdom and care in the way we use our words! In the book of Proverbs, a beautiful description of the tongue is given. We read: “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (Pro. 12:18). How wonderful to know that we may promote the health of others by the potential of the words we speak. Our speech may create healthy environments in our home, in the church, and in our nation! When emotions are at their lowest, a word of encouragement may lift the broken

spirit: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Pro. 25:11).

Is my tongue tamed or is it wild? The way we use our speech may be a weapon of mass destruction or it can be a blessing bringing life and joy to those about whom and to whom we speak! May we ever be reminded that: “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles” (Pro. 21:23). May we never use our tongues as a weapon of mass destruction, but as a power to bring life to men and honor and praise to God!

Heaven: The Victory Is Ours

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born in Bradford, Tennessee, in 1931. He was baptized in 1944. Robert began preaching in 1949. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, and George Peabody for Teachers. He has done local work in Tennessee and Mississippi for fifty-six years. He has been at Ripley, Tennessee, for forty-one years. He has preached in about 500 gospel meetings and over 700 lectureships throughout the nation. Robert has presented over 6,500 sermons on radio and TV. For 28 years, he has helped with a prison ministry and baptized inmates. He has served as an instructor in the Online Academy of Biblical Studies for 15 years. He has been married to Irene for 63 years. They have two children and four grandchildren. He has authored thirty-five books and twenty-five tracts. For seventeen and one-half years, he wrote material for *Gospel Advocate Quarterlies* and the Annual companion. Between 1969 and 1977, he served as a staff writer under B. C. Goodpasture, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. On January 1, 2011, he retired from local work but continues to be an active member at Ripley. He is now spending time in gospel meetings and lectureships and an immense amount of time in writing.

What a continuing joy and honor it is to speak each July on an always relevant lectureship. This year is no different. Abounding gratitude is expressed to Don, Robert, the elders, and each treasured member of the great Southaven congregation for the invitation to speak on the 2016 lectureship and to pen a chapter for the published

volume. I have made it a yearly habit to read the entire lectureship book soon after the final session has closed. Time for such has been invested wisely.

Victory Now And Then

Upon our acceptance of the glorious gospel of Christ, we win a valiant victory over Satan and sin. Every sin of the past—mental, vocal, and in deed—is pardoned in the powerful and precious blood of the crucified Christ on Calvary as we hear, believe, repent, confess His Deity and are baptized (immersed) into Christ and the atoning benefits of His cleansing blood. Paul, in Romans 6:3-4, is crystal clear on this point. He wrote,

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

Victory continues with our faithfulness and fervency to the Christ. Christianity is the religion of victory over sin, Satan, and all the world has to offer. Victory was at the point of John's pen when he wrote in excellency and eloquence,

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

Victory permeated the closing verses of Romans 8. The Pauline crescendo is reached when he wrote brilliantly and boldly, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). Victory was still at the point of Paul’s pen when he neared the end of the great resurrection chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15. He penned words worthy and wonderful in verse 57, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

The thrill of his final victory rings out in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 as he penned,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Victory was now his and for it he was profoundly grateful. Becoming and remaining a Christian is the only way to win victories over Satan, sin, and the world.

Heaven: The Paramount Goal

This was why Enoch walked with God for 300 or more years (Gen. 5:21-24; Heb. 11:5; Jude 14-15). This is why Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations whose Builder and Maker is God (Heb. 11:10). This is why Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob shared with him the same heavenly aspiration (Heb. 11:12-16).

David looked forward to dwelling in the house of the Lord forever (Psa. 23:6). He surely did not have the earthly tabernacle Moses had built in mind. As a member of Judah's tribe, he was not permitted to enter the tabernacle. Even if he had built the temple, he would have not been permitted an entrance into its sacred places. At a low ebb in his life, he gave up an infant son. He knew he could not call him back, but he could go and be with that son in the next life (2 Sam. 12:23).

Heaven, as a sure goal, motivated godly patriarchs, faithful priests, righteous kings, godly prophets, and pious Israelites throughout the Old Testament.

Jesus Christ had come from heaven and was destined to return to the Palace of the Universe upon finishing His earthly sojourn. He pointed His disciples to the never-ending realm where Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets would be (Mat. 8:11; Luke 13:28-29).

In the Upper Room Discourse, John 13-16, Jesus emphasized four cardinal beliefs for His disciples to attain and then maintain: (1) faith in God, (2) faith in Him as God's Son, (3) faith in the surety of the second advent, and (4) faith in the rich reality of heaven, the place of many mansions (John 14:1-3). Heaven became the paramount goal of all His faithful disciples. The same should be said of us also.

A fine Christian lady once said to me in essence, "Since heaven is the goal of all of us, would it not be wise if you preachers preached more about heaven?" I have never forgotten her sage counsel and have written frequently and preached often on the great theme of heaven. It should never be an ignored or neglected part of the gospel we present.

The Rich Reality Of Heaven

Patriarchs knew of heaven's reality. Allusion has already been made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah who looked

forward to heaven (Heb. 11:12-16). Many were the times reference was made to the departed as being gathered to their people (Gen. 25:8; Gen. 35:29; Gen. 49:33). This refers to the great beyond and not a burial spot in mother earth. For instance, Abraham was not buried in Haran where Terah was entombed or among ancestors in Ur of the Chaldees.

Heaven was real to David as he said an earthly good-bye to his infant son in 2 Samuel 12:23.

Daniel, in Daniel 12:2-3, recognized fully and faithfully the immortality of the soul. Far more than Babylonian rewards received, Daniel and his three Hebrew companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, viewed the reality of heaven as their major motivation for faithful service to Jehovah in captivity.

John the Baptist surely knew of heaven's reality as he faced heroically the axe man in Matthew 14 and Mark 6. Did he lose his head for an eternal nothing? Absolutely not!

Jesus knew so well of its rich reality. He had been there, as the Eternal Word forever. He came from there to this sin-cursed earth. He prayed to His Father Who was in heaven. At the end of His earthly stay, He knew a return to heaven was upon his sure threshold (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; Luke 24:51). He spoke of heaven's reality in Matthew 13:43 and Matthew 25:31-46. Heaven, to Jesus, was just as real as God's green footstool where He had sojourned for a third of a century.

Simon Peter knew of heaven's reality. In John 13:36, Jesus promised Peter that later he would follow Him to that Eternal Paradise. Peter wrote about the reality of heaven in Words of weight, worth, and wonder, "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). He assured his fellow elders with these hope-filled words, "And when the Chief

Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4). Near the end of his second epistle he wrote, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). This refers to heaven—not a renovated earth as envisioned by Jehovah’s Witnesses for all except the 144,000. Peter had just concluded describing the destiny of this old earth in 2 Peter 3:10-12.

Paul knew of the rich reality of heaven. He had been there according to what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:1ff and therefore wrote as an inspired eyewitness and an inspired ear witness. He had written earlier in 2 Corinthians 5 relative to the reality of that Upper and Better Kingdom—the heavenly habitation. He prefaced this Corinthian message by stating,

For we know that if our earthly house of
this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a
building of God, an house not made with
hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1)

Heaven was on Paul’s mind as he wrote a farewell message to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. He expressed it in three Pauline viewpoints: (1) I have fought a good fight—the Roman viewpoint. (2) I have finished my course—the Greek viewpoint. (3) I have kept the faith—the Hebrew viewpoint. For a surety, heaven was real for the peerless Paul.

That disciple Jesus loved, John the apostle, wrote frequently, faithfully, and fervently of heaven’s rich reality. In John 5:28-29, he wrote of the resurrection of life as touching prepared people. He is the inspired scribe who described the house of many mansions which Jesus was preparing for His people (John 14:1-3). To the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2-3, he promised heaven to those who would

overcome (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:26-28; Rev. 3:5; Rev. 3:12; Rev. 3:21). Glimpses of glory filled his two final chapters in the book of Revelation (Rev. 21-22). Surely, heavenly hope permeated his pure heart as he wrote, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

If there be no heaven for an earnest Enoch, a noble Noah, an active Abraham, a just Joseph, a mighty Moses, a saintly Samuel, a devout David, an intense Isaiah, a judicious Jeremiah, a dedicated Daniel, the holy Hosea, the holy Harbinger, the peerless Peter, the patient Paul, the just John, the saintly Stephen, and all faithful and fervent followers of the Christ, what shall be said about proper rewards for lives filled with virtue, patience, sobriety, righteousness, godliness, and faithful integrity? If there be no heaven as an eternal reward, all the foregoing died for nothing and will never be rewarded. Are the scales of justice that inadequate?

Glorious Glimpses Of Heaven

Delightful descriptions are given of the home of the soul in the Book Divine. I shall number and note a few of them in this stately section of our study.

1. The glorious glimpse of **rest** is portrayed in the New Testament. Paul wrote, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Incidentally, I have no doubt but what Paul is the inspired penman of the book of Hebrews. I have never read anything that made me question his authorship. In Paul’s second epistle to the Thessalonian saints, Paul spoke of two classes at judgment—the troublers or persecutors and the troubled or the persecuted. To the wicked, Jesus will render tribulation to those who have troubled or persecuted God’s people (2 The. 1:6). To those who have been troubled or persecuted, Jesus will render rest (2 The. 1:7). By the way, “rest” in verse 7 is not used as a

verb, as many superficial commentators have contended. It is a noun. Paul surely knew what his Lord had promised in the Precious Invitation of Matthew 11:28-30 which reads,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In these precious and priceless words Jesus employed the word “rest” twice. More than likely the first one refers to the rest in this life as our sins are forgiven and we are accepted as His disciples while the second surely refers to heavenly rest.

In one of the seven beatitudes gracing the Book of Revelation, John wrote,

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. (Rev. 14:13)

Fatigue accompanies stringent labor. We all have experienced it, whether it be physical or mental fatigue. I grew up on a farm in northwest Tennessee. In those days we farmed with horses and mules. My father never owned a tractor. Vividly, I recall the fatigue I daily felt after following a breaking plow pulled by horses and mules. They were always more spirited when it was time to head for the barn at quitting time than during the day’s work! Rest during the

night was always a welcomed repose, yet the next day offered more of the same!

The Holy Spirit knew what rest meant to tired bodies and minds. Therefore, He portrayed heaven as a place of rest. In the 1950s, brother Boone Douthitt and I conducted the funeral for a saintly lady in Middle Tennessee. The day of the funeral one of her loved ones told me of one of her last comments, “I am tired and I want to go home.” She was not speaking of her earthly edifice for she made that statement in her earthly home. She, by faith that refused to waver, was speaking of the rest that remains for the child of God (Heb. 4:9).

Rest is surely a treasured glimpse of glory of the beyond.

2. The glorious glimpse of heaven as a **better place** is thrilling to contemplate. Better is the keynote of the book of Hebrews. It occurs some 12 times in these 13 chapters and 303 verses as per my count. Paul wrote,

For ye had compassion of me in my bonds and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. (Heb. 10:34)

The subsequent verse extends the precious promise of a “great recompense of reward” (Heb. 10:35). In the great faith chapter, Hebrews 11, Paul penned these rich, rewarding words,

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:16)

Humanity is always interested in that which is better whether it be a better job, a better house, a better car, a better community in which to live, etc. Spiritually-minded people are interested in what is better for their immortal souls. The Holy Spirit knew perfectly of this human trait and has given us the golden glimpse of heaven as a better place, better by far than anything experienced on earth.

3. The Glorious Glimpse of the **new** captures our instant attention. Christianity is described as the “new and living way” (Heb. 10:20). Jeremiah looked forward to the coming of the “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31-34). *New* has also been stamped upon heaven. Peter wrote of the new heavens and new earth in 2 Peter 3:13. John, on Patmos, saw “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). In Revelation 21:2, John saw the “new Jerusalem.” This has no reference to old Jerusalem that had slain prophets and even the Prince of glory. Neither does it have reference to a so-called millennial Jerusalem for a 1,000-year reign of an earthly Messiah. The New Jerusalem is another glorious glimpse of heaven.

4. Then there is the glorious glimpse of the **prepared bride**. This is a delightful description banished John saw on Patmos in Revelation 21:2. No doubt John had seen many young, beautiful brides in radiant splendor ready to be claimed by the love of their life, their fortunate grooms. So have we all in our day. I have been performing marriage ceremonies since 1951 when I performed my first one for my sister, Sue, to Chuck Henley. Beaming brides at their beautiful best come back to my mind. Many of these brides I have known since they were infants having watched them grow into marvelous maturity. Many of them I have taught and baptized them in their teen-age years. I recall with much pleasure one ceremony when I baptized the bride into Christ during the afternoon and performed her wedding

ceremony that evening. In her case there were two marriages that eventful day—a marriage to Jesus Christ and the one to her handsome husband. He was already a Christian. I had baptized him as a young teen-ager years before. I had been his preacher for many years as he was growing up.

The Holy Spirit knew this precious picture would add delight to Christians on their way to heaven at last.

5. Now we have the glorious glimpse of heaven as a **city**. Patient patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). In Hebrews 11:16 we read how God had prepared for them a city. Sarah is included for a surety in this lovely list (Heb. 11:11).

But the heavenly city will not be like earthly cities that have been filled with crime, corruption, violence, etc. That which defiles and produces abomination will be absent as per Revelation 21:27. Revelation 21:8 and Revelation 22:15 inform us where all the vile, violent, and wicked will be. The late and lamented E. R. Harper, near the end of his fruitful life, told a close preacher friend that if he could preach just one more sermon, it would be based upon Revelation 21:8 whose title would be “Who’s Who In Hell.” Why have some of our preachers in the latter part of their life begun to deny the reality of hell? Brother Harper knew better than to do that.

6. The Bible presents glorious glimpses of the **no mores**.

John touched several of these in Revelation 21-22. There will be no more tears (Rev. 21:4). Tears are part and parcel of this life. The same Mighty Hand that once dipped into a vast nothing and produced an amazing Universe is the same Mighty Hand that will wipe away all tears from the eyes of the saved (Rev. 21:4) “No Tears In Heaven” is a lovely lyric we have all sung with the edification it brings the sons and daughters of men.

There will be no more death. Death is common to man and has been since Abel's demise in Genesis 4. Of the multiplied billions of past individuals, only two have escaped this physical penalty—Enoch and Elijah. "And he died" occurs repeatedly in Genesis 5 and applied to all named in that chapter except Enoch. Unless Jesus should come in our lifetime, this same expression will be our final epitaph with just a pronoun change for women.

There will be no more sorrow. Here sorrow is as common as any experience that comes to us. Here we are sons of sorrow and daughters of desolation and discouragement. It is never far from any of our thresholds. Sorrow will be no part of the heavenly world.

There will be no more pain. Pain is as old as the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden. Many who read this know pain 24/7. It is permanent yet an always unwelcomed intruder. Those free of it one day may know a lifetime of it beginning the very next day. Just one accident can trigger such.

In heaven there will be no need of sun, moon, or stars for Deity will be the light of heaven. There will be no night, no sin, no defilement, no abomination, no violence, nothing vile, no corruption, and no liars. Heaven is surely a realm of "no mores."

7. Finally, we have the glorious glimpse of **eternal fellowship**. Fellowship is joint participation or being a joint partaker.

Koinonia, the Greek word for *fellowship*, is one of the richest of all Greek terms in the Bible. We know part of its riches here but not in the perfection that will prevail in the sweet bye and bye.

There will be eternal fellowship with the "Father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). He has been the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Jam. 1:17). He is the One to Whom we

have addressed our prayers (Mat. 6:9). He is the One who loved us sufficiently that He sent His only begotten Son, the marvelous monogenes, for our redemption (John 3:16). He is the One who desires the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9). He is the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

There will be eternal fellowship with Jesus Christ. He is Creator of all (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17). He left portals of glory to come to this lowland of sickness, sin, and sorrow to seek to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He died, was buried, was raised, ascended back to heaven, and finalized the plan to save man. He is our Saviour, Prophet, Priest, King, Mediator, Advocate and the One through Whom we pray to the Father on heavenly high.

There will be eternal fellowship with the Holy Spirit. He was active in physical creation as we see in Genesis 1:1-2 and is ever active in spiritual creations in the realms of conversion and sanctification. He inspired the writing of both Testaments. He is our Helper and Intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27).

There will be eternal fellowship with all precious children who died before reaching the age of accountability, the faithful under patriarchy, Moses and the prophets and under Christ and Christianity. All this will be fellowship at its perfected best. Nothing parallels it here. Here we have but a foretaste.

This Heavenly Hope Sustains Us

It did God’s faithful warriors in Bible times and can do the same for us in 2016.

John Stuart Mill, 1806-1873, was a world philosopher. It is reported of him that he said something like this in his later adult life, “I would give all I have, and all I ever hope to

have, if for one hour I could look at the sky and call it heaven as I did when a boy.” He had lost his childhood faith. There was nothing in all his worldly acclaims that came close to compensating his great loss. Had he never read the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:26,

For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Conclusion

“Heaven will surely be worth it all” rings with victory in every saintly syllable.

Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Media: Movies, Music, Entertainment

Rose Crayton



A native of Alabama, Rose grew up living equally between Alabama and Michigan. She holds BA degrees in Psychology and Human Resource Management from the University of Alabama and worked for several large companies over sixteen years as a Human Resources Manager/Consultant. She left the corporate arena in 2002 to support her husband as he attended preaching school. Rose has had the privilege of doing mission work in South Africa and the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico. She teaches Bible classes and speaks often at ladies events, retreats, and lectureships. Rose is married to St. Louis, Missouri, native Todd Crayton. Todd is a 2004 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and currently serves as the evangelist for the Frisco Church of Christ in Frisco, Texas. They have two sons, Micah (17) and Noah (14).

Seemingly as long as man has existed, he has sought ways to entertain himself, most often outside the parameters of God's law. From King Ahasuerus' inappropriate desire to parade Queen Vashti before his drunken princes (KJV, Est.1:10-11) to Herod's rash vow to Herodias' daughter when her provocative dancing pleased him (Mark 6:22) to the Israelites who "sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (Exo. 32:6), man has sought pleasure and run head-first into sin and destruction. In our current times, Satan has a world-wide vehicle that sinner and saint alike run to in the name of relaxation and leisure: it is called *media*. Sadly, the media of

music, movies, and entertainment is being used effectively to take the focus and hearts of Christians from vigilantly fighting against the evils of this world to welcoming and embracing sin without even recognizing the dangers. Satan is cleverly using media to destroy the moral foundation of society and he is hugely successful while many are unwittingly accepting its impact as just a sign of the times which most feel helpless to stop. Yet Christians, the true disciples of Christ, are to live in this world, but “are not of the world” (John 17:14) and because they love the Lord, they are “to hate evil” (Psa. 97:10).

This lesson will review what media is, its influence, and how Christians can guard against its wicked and deadly pull to destroy their souls.

Understanding Mass Media And Entertainment

Mass Media Versus Entertainment

It is virtually impossible to speak of the entertainment industry without mentioning media. While many think they have a pretty good grasp of what media is, a closer look at its scope and reach may be surprising. The following is a lengthy but fairly straight-forth synopsis of *media* and its evolution:

Mass media is communication—whether written, broadcast, or spoken—that reaches a large audience. This includes television, radio, advertising, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, and so forth. Mass media is a significant force in modern culture, but especially so in America. Sociologists refer to this as a **mediated culture** where

media reflects and creates the culture. Communities and individuals are bombarded constantly with messages from a multitude of sources including TV, billboards, and magazines, to name a few. These messages promote not only products, but moods, attitudes, and a sense of what is and is not important. Mass media makes possible the concept of celebrity: without the ability of movies, magazines, and news media to reach across thousands of miles, people could not become famous. In fact, only political and business leaders, as well as the few notorious outlaws, were famous in the past. Only in recent times have actors, singers, and other social elites become celebrities or “stars.”

The current level of media saturation has not always existed. As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, television, for example, consisted of primarily three networks, public broadcasting, and a few local independent stations. These channels aimed their programming primarily at two-parent, middle-class families. Even so, some middle-class households did not even own a television. Today, one can find a television in the poorest of homes, and multiple TVs in most middle-class homes. Not only has availability increased, but programming is increasingly diverse with shows aimed

to please all ages, incomes, backgrounds, and attitudes. This widespread availability and exposure makes television the primary focus of most mass-media discussions. More recently, the Internet has increased its role exponentially as more businesses and households “sign on.” Although TV and the Internet have dominated the mass media, movies and magazines—particularly those lining the aisles at grocery checkout stands—also play a powerful role in culture, as do other forms of media. While opinions vary as to the extent and type of influence the mass media wields, all sides agree that mass media is a permanent part of modern culture. (“The Role”)

The general acceptance that mass media is a “permanent part of modern culture” should give the Christian cause for concern considering a large part of entertainment involves mass media and both are growing exponentially. One can even go so far as to say they are co-dependent given the following:

Entertainment is a form of activity that holds the attention and interest of an audience, or gives pleasure and delight. It can be an idea or a task, but is more likely to be one of the activities or events that have developed over years specifically for the purpose of keeping an audience’s attention. (Wikipedia, “Entertainment”)

The *Oxford English Dictionary*

gives Latin and French origins for the word, including *inter* (among) + *tenir* (to hold) as derivations, giving translations of “to hold mutually” or “to hold intertwined” and “to engage, keep occupied, the attention, thoughts or time (of a person). (Wikipedia, “Entertainment” Ref. 1)

This interdependency should not be misunderstood or taken lightly. **Media is a tool used by the entertainment industry to communicate information that seeks to engage and keep occupied our attention, thoughts, and time!** Anything that keeps “one’s attention, thoughts and time occupied” is something that Satan can use to distract Christians from their one true mission: to glorify God (Isa. 43:7; Psa. 86:9; John 15:8). Satan is successful in luring people into his web and holding them there by the profusion of entertainment and the ease of access, especially with the rise of digital and Internet media. Christians and society would do well to heed the warning from human rights activist, Malcolm X: “The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses” (Goodreads).

The Scope And Reach Of Media

The Profits. The problem of media saturation facing Christians is enormous and Christians should seek to understand how prevalent and widespread the problem poses because ignoring the media is not an option.

The U.S. media & entertainment (M&E) industry is comprised of businesses that produce and distribute motion pictures, television programs and commercials along with music and audio recordings, radio, games and publishing. The U.S. M&E market, which represents a third of the global industry, and is the largest M&E market worldwide, reached \$594.7 billion in 2015; it is expected to gross 723.4 in 2019. (Statista)

As of the end of 2015, Comcast Corp. was the world's biggest media company with market share value of \$147.8 billion, beating out rivals like The Walt Disney Company, Twenty-First Century Fox, and Time Warner Cable who are not far behind. (Johnson)

“The film industry is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, player in the broader entertainment sector; it is considered a cornerstone of the industry” (“Statistics and Facts”). The top three movies of 2015 grossed revenues so large, they almost seem unreal. Box office revenue of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* grossed over \$936M, \$652M and \$459M, respectively (“2015 Domestic Grosses”). Not surprisingly, these companies did not become the industry giants they are without the help and patronage of people spending countless hours and resources.

If film consumerism is not mind-boggling enough, the amount of time the average person spends on digital

media, watching television, and time shifting (recording of programming to a storage medium to be viewed, read or listened to after the live broadcasting) is flabbergasting!

On average, people spend more than 490 minutes [over 8.1 hours] of their day with some sort of media, according to a new report by ZenithOptimedia. Television remains dominant, accounting for three hours of daily consumption—an hour more than the internet, in second place. (The report measures media consumed in its traditional form—for example, broadcasts on television sets and newspapers in print. Watching videos on the web or reading a newspaper’s website counts as internet consumption.)

By 2017, we will find even more time in the day to take in media—half of our waking life is apparently not enough—with global average consumption set to rise to 506 minutes [over 8.4 hours]. (Karaian)

The Losses. While the entertainment industry reaps astronomical financial benefits from consumers, numerous studies are currently being conducted on media’s influence on society and specifically the generation currently growing up on a steady diet of social media and technology. Clearly society is losing. On May 3, 2016—shortly before this was written—the *Today Show* featured a story on teen addiction to mobile devices and social media. In that news clip, Joe Fryer reported *The Common Sense Media* survey results

which revealed that 50% of teens aged 12-18 feel addicted to mobile devices and social media, and nearly 60% of parents concur. Seventy-seven per cent of parents say during family time, kids are distracted by devices and do not pay attention at least a few times a week. Sadly, the survey said this goes both ways in that 41% of children say the same thing about their parents. Calls to adolescent addiction treatment centers about social media addiction are on the rise.

Entertainment and media consume time and energy that could be spent serving others, studying and meditating on God's Word, and connecting with our families. This obsession is another clever ploy by Satan (all in the name of entertainment) to keep the Christian so busy and pre-occupied he does not have time to "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1).

Without doubt, media does have good benefits, but constant exposure to sinful conversations, messages, movies, and television programs can be harmful. What one exposes himself to will influence his thinking and subsequently his behavior. After all, "evil companions corrupt good morals" (ASV, 1 Cor. 15:33) and media can become an evil companion.

Basically, mass media forms the image of the world for us and tell us what to think about that image. Essentially, everything we know comes to us via our newspapers, magazines, radio or television. The manipulating techniques of media masters come across in the way some items are played down while some others are emphasized by their choice of words, tone of voice, facial

expressions, headlines and the choice of illustrations—all these things subliminally and subtly affect the way we interpret what we see or hear. (“Top Ten Media”)

Malcolm X stated it this way, “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing” (Goodreads). Certainly the same can be said of television, the Internet, and all other media today.

Peter warned Christians to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Paul urges Christians to have the mind of Christ (Phi. 2:5) and not to be influenced by worldly things.

Perhaps the biggest victim in media influence is children. Children are growing up in a world in which they will never live without media’s widespread reach.

The media’s assault on our kids’ innocence has become increasingly explicit and intrusive. From TV to movies, from music to the Internet, popular culture saturates kids’ lives. The messages are sometimes blatant (such as the celebration of premarital sex) and sometimes subtle (such as disrespect for parents and other authorities)... Michael and Diane Medved wrote in their book *Saving Childhood*, “The very idea of parental protectiveness has been overwhelmed by relentless pressure

from a society that seems determined to expose its young to every perversion and peril in an effort to ‘prepare’ them for a harsh, dangerous future.” (Dalfonzo)

This is clearly another ploy of Satan, vying for our minds, minds that should be focused on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Phi. 4:8). And because entertainment is fun and media so pervasive, Christians who engage in binge-watching television shows, watching back-to-back movies, or playing marathon rounds of video games are falling right into Satan’s hands. Satan’s goal is to catch the unguarded heart and infiltrate and desensitize the mind to the sin that is present in so many of these media venues. Media messages today are heavily shaped and controlled by the large corporations that are try to sell you, the consumer, something. Even more appalling, sex appeal is used as the primary means to lure people in; sadly, sex sells. The media uses sex, and specifically the objectification of women, to sell everything from hamburgers (Paris Hilton & Kim Kardashian’s racy Carl’s Jr. commercial) to luxury cars to cosmetics. Who does not want to be more beautiful, have perfect hair, wear the fashions all the celebrities are wearing, and drive the latest car? After all, media advertising would lead one to believe anyone can be better a version of self by indulging in what is being sold.

The Battle For Our Attention

Solomon said in Proverbs 4:23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” In the midst of a world saturated with negative images, sexual lewdness, vile speech, and salacious songs, Christians are encouraged to guard their hearts. Satan is waging a battle for our hearts and

minds, and he is using heavy artillery via the bombardment of constant media and entertainment.

God Wants Our Attention

Eleven occasions in Scripture, God's people are told to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mat. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Deu.6:5; Deu. 30:6). God wants our total devotion and He wants our minds to be fixed on Him. Why? To keep His children from falling into sin. Several times in Scripture, God declares He is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5; Exo. 34:14; Deu. 4:24; Deu. 5:9) who wants to keep His people from idols (1 John 5:21). Christians are called to be holy in all manner of conversation as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). The holiness required to please our Lord requires one be like the Psalmist and declare, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (Psa. 101:3). He did not say he would never see wickedness, but that he would not deliberately seek it out. God desires Christians to show maturity and discern what is good or evil (Heb. 5:14). That discernment must be exercised when it comes to what he watches and hears and "Abhor that which is evil; [and] cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9).

Redeeming The Time

Ephesians 5:15-17 reads: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord." Paul says Christians spent their lives in selfish, sinful practices before meeting Christ and putting Him on in baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21), but that after we are saved, we should use the opportunities afforded for God and His purpose.

It is not a sin to utilize media in one's life, but when that usage conflicts with spiritual priorities, Christ must come first. Therefore, the amount of time and/or content of media

consumed must not exceed the desire to please to God. Jesus said, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). The word “hate” in this Scripture means “to be disinclined to, disfavor, disregard in contrast to preferential treatment” (Greek Lexicon). In other words, Christians are to hate (“love less”) everything and everyone more than God. That includes those things that occupy one’s time such as Facebook, Garth Brooks, Podcasts, Pinterest or “The Voice.” One’s love for a favorite media/entertainment outlet should not exceed one’s love for God. The soldier of Christ is commanded to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation (Mark 14:38) and set a strict guard on his heart (Pro. 4:23). Precious time should not be wasted indiscriminately. It behooves the child of God to redeem the time and choose his entertainment wisely.

The Power Of Suggestion

While movies, music, magazines, the Internet, books, and other media can inspire positively (e.g., Gospel Broadcasting Network, *The Truth In Love* and various *Know Your Bible* television programs, *Christian Woman* magazine, books written by Christian authors), the power of today’s media and entertainment to sway human behavior negatively is a constant and real threat to all. The soldier of Christ must “Put on the whole armour of God, that [he] may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

While documented evidence points to the influence of violent images on extreme behaviors such as school shootings in recent years, higher suicide rates in teens and an increase in swearing, a greater threat than the obvious negative influences exists and that is Christians of all ages who do not pay attention to the less egregious influences in

entertainment. Consider, for instance, the virtual onslaught of sexual themes pervading today's pop music, video games, television, books, and even toys. Even before children (especially girls) are aware of their own sexuality, they receive cues to start dressing and talking in sexual ways.

In the present political climate of 2016, children are now allowed to decide for themselves whether they are a boy or a girl and the entire country is currently discussing whether individuals must use the bathroom of their birth gender or their adopted and opposite gender, referred to as transgender. In the midst of the superabundant media coverage, Facebook rants, and general outrage on all sides, lines have been drawn and a very important fact overlooked: the ever-present coverage and media's treatment and intensification of same-sex unions, LGBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender) issues, and rampant fornication in programming has lulled many viewers into thinking sin is acceptable when God clearly states it not (Rom. 1:21-32)! Satan is the father of lies and subtlety (John 8:44; Gen. 3:1) and uses media to plant suggestions of sin in the minds of Christians and the world alike. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20).

Consider also attitudes of disrespect among youth toward adults and the assimilation of profanity—which can simply be picked up from commercials—into everyday vocabulary. When actor Samuel L. Jackson used profanity in a Capital One Quicksilver credit card commercial, the angry backlash was quick and immediate, but the damage had been done. To young minds who revered Mr. Jackson as the trusted, dependable, and super-cool Frozone in the movie *The Incredibles*, swearing was now legitimized.

The PBS television show, *Calliou*, was not allowed in my own house when my sons were younger, because the main

character, Calliou, was whiny, bratty, and spoiled. Those were not traits to be taught in a Christian home, and especially my home. Children portrayed through media have tremendous influence on young minds; whether the characters portray good qualities or undesirable ones, the message is almost always received and emulated by young minds.

Spiritual missteps influenced by messages in media and entertainment happen in Christian homes every single day. Practically anyone can “stumble” into lusting or pornography by a simple click of a mouse to access a website whether by accident or intentionally. For the past two years, two unwanted magazines have arrived in the mail at my house, magazines to which we had not subscribed. It was evident the person sending the magazine to my home did not know me very well or they would have known a subscription to *Self* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines were not of interest to me, nor would I want my teenage sons to be exposed to their content or even the immodest and indecent covers.

Armed For Defense

Someone has said, “The best defense is a good offense.” The Christian’s best defenses against Satan’s media attack on the moral fiber of society are to arm oneself with knowledge and to take steps to prevent exposure to media’s influence in their lives.

Take Entertainment Decisions Seriously.

We all make decisions about entertainment and most do so with only one question in mind: Do I think I will enjoy this program, movie, game, or CD? But that is the wrong place to start. It is important to realize that our enjoyment is not God’s highest priority. He is much more concerned that we love and obey Him. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Taking media seriously

means our choices should be determined by God's thoughts. Although this idea is straightforward, experience reveals that living it out can be challenging.

Approach Choices From A Biblical Perspective.

What are God's thoughts on entertainment? Although Jesus never said, "Thou shalt not listen to rap, heavy metal, or acid rock" or "Thou shalt not watch *Dancing With The Stars*," His Word offers guidance as to how we should monitor what influences us (Pro. 4:23; Col. 2:8; Psa. 101:3; Rom. 8:5-12).

Aligning our choices with a biblical worldview means our choices will often directly conflict with popular culture. Even Christians struggle with being different and "left out" at times. However, the mindset of Christians necessitates that they want to please God more than be entertained. Remember, God's concern is our righteousness and holiness, not our entertainment! Satan's aim is to place obstacles (entertainment) in the way to distract us.

Train Children To Make Good Media Choices.

Although there are other factors such as age appropriateness, Christian maturity, personal weaknesses and gray areas, most decisions can be made "in light of Christ" if we would simply ask the question, what does the Bible say on this matter? Or we could phrase the popular saying from years past, *What Would Jesus Do?* While the saying is cliché, the principle applies. Teaching children to seek God's counsel (Psa. 1:1-2; Pro. 1:5; Pro. 19:21) on every matter can protect them now and help them eventually adopt the practice for life.

Choose Tools To Fight Media's Lure.

Media is neutral; it is simply a delivery system for information and content, a tool. The content of the media and its influence in the Christian's life is not! Therefore, how the Christian addresses the media presence in his life can

thwart Satan's attack on the moral fiber of Christians and society as well. Being vigilant and proactive are paramount.

The following are some practical tips for neutralizing and negating media's influence in the Christian's life:

Television And Movies

1. Turn it off / Do not go.

This may be difficult to do, but just go cold turkey! Take a break from television and movies altogether. Consider getting a Roku or another streaming device to make better choices of what is watched.

2. Set time limits and make a pact.

Do not indulge in mindless, unlimited television watching and movies. Only watch TV after you have read several Bible chapters, completed devotional, performed a service for someone else, or visited a fellow Christian. Make it a one-to-one deal or you will find yourself spending less time serving/studying and more time watching TV.

3. Adhere to standards of modesty, language, violence, sexual conduct.

If inappropriate content is present, change the channel immediately! The adage, "Garbage-in-garbage-out" applies. Do not dig down to the bottom of the garbage can to get one morsel of good teaching.

4. Use websites and TV/movie filtering devices:

- ClearPlay for DVDs and Blu-Ray; TV Guardian; Built-in Parental Controls on satellite/cable subscriptions
- ScreenIt.com, PluggedIn.com (Reviews already written for TV shows and movies)
- FamilySafeMedia.com, CommonSenseMedia, Kids-In-Mind.com.
- TV Timer Bob (sets time allowances for each person, turns device off when time is reached)

4. Keep televisions in public places in the home; avoid bedrooms or remote locations.
5. Watch TV/movies as a family to hold each other accountable and avoid temptation.
6. Turn off commercials with overtly sexual overtones and scantily clad women.

Music

1. Google lyrics of songs.
2. Use PluggedIn.com to get a review of the song's content, lyrics, and themes.
3. Regularly check iPod/iPhone playlists and delete inappropriate songs.
4. Maintain control of app downloads, IDs, and passwords (the phones and the content belong to the adults—monitor them).

Games

1. Screen games for profanity and nudity before purchasing (many contain mature subjects and sexual images).
2. Use TV Timer-Bob or a Token Timer on gaming stations to limit playing time (found on FamilySafeMedia.com).
3. Review game content on PluggedIn.com.

Internet /Smart Phones

Warning: Internet users beware! Every evil is already in your home if you have Internet!

1. Always keep computer in a public place (laptops, smartphones, iPads, too!).
2. No Internet access in bedrooms or isolated locations.
3. Use accountability/tracking software to track sites visited (SafeEyes.com, NetNanny.com).
4. Use blockers to block specific websites, especially pornography sites.

- More than half of all children are accidentally exposed to pornography each year. Educate yourself and your children on avoiding pornography and be sure to set a proper example in this matter (1 Cor. 6:18; Pro. 5:8).
 - Net Nanny, CovenantEyes, The Web Blocker, CleanInternet.com and K9 Web Protection provide reports of websites visited, search terms used, and YouTube videos watched.
5. Remember: You are not alone. The Internet is global with nearly 3 billion people currently online; that's over 40% of the world's population ("About Us").

Social Media

Time spent on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, and many other technology social apps can cultivate relationships and a sense of community, but it can also harm one's reputation, the church, and even future employment opportunities if not handled with care.

1. Remember you have no anonymity on Facebook and other social media sites.
2. Your digital footprint follows you for life.
3. Think before you post, send, or upload (If emotional, wait 24 hours before posting).
4. Ask, why am I posting this?
5. Ask, how will this reflect upon me as a Christian? Reflect upon the church?
6. Ask, will this post hinder my ability to teach others the gospel?
7. Decide who you are and how you want to be seen (You are what you post!).
8. Do not use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., to brag, badmouth spouse, spew sarcasm, repost negative

comments, rant, make inappropriate political statements, share inappropriate photos, or poke fun at others' expense.

9. 500 Million Tweets are sent per day ("About Us"); do not feel you have to respond to them all!

10. Remember: Social media posts are your voice! Speak wisely (Eph. 4:29).

Conclusion

In the battle for their souls, Christians have a huge challenge in repelling media's grasping hand to consume their lives. Media and entertainment's influence are ubiquitous and Christians can find themselves overcome from its sheer reach and appeal. But Christians serve a faithful and mighty God who has given tools to use to assure victory in the battle over media and entertainment and Satan's design to further destroy the moral fabric of society. The soldier of Christ must develop a hatred for sin and all things God hates (Pro. 8:13; Rom. 12:9); diligently guard his heart (Psa. 119:11); and refuse to flirt with temptation (Pro. 5:8; Mat. 5:29) (Blackwell). May Christians everywhere "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it (Psa. 34:13-14) and "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul (Psa. 121:7).

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Hypocrisy

Courtney Ruiz



Courtney Ruiz grew up as a preacher's daughter and has been a preacher's wife for 25 years. She graduated from the University of Memphis with a Communication Studies degree. She is married to Kevin, and together they have three daughters and one son. The Ruiz family serves as foster parents for the Smoky Mountain region and were blessed to have had a preschooler, a toddler, and an infant share their home last year. Courtney has taught Bible classes for all ages and has a special place in her heart for the cradle roll Bible class.

Recently, politicians have proposed legislation permitting the drafting of American women for combat military service, sparking a highly controversial debate between political/social conservatives and liberals. Speaking of the spiritual realm, however, we know that Christian women have long fought voluntarily as “soldiers of the cross” in active combat on the front lines of the war against Satan and his forces. Just as military personnel must be continuously equipped and trained to meet the challenges of political enemies, so, too, Christian “soldiers” must be ready for any and all attacks Satan may use against us.

In recent decades, military strategists have faced the growing threat of terrorism and the use of weapons of mass destruction, as “military planners are concerned that an enemy will seize victory not through force-on-force, but instead, by the threat of disseminating deadly biological and

chemical agents on the battlefield” (Dickinson 41). A weapon of mass destruction (WMD) is defined as a “weapon with the capacity to inflict death and destruction on such a massive scale and so indiscriminately that its very presence in the hands of a hostile power can be considered a grievous threat” (“Weapon”). Christians engaged in spiritual warfare against the ultimate adversary, Satan, have long been attacked by such subversive weapons, and Christian women have long been among his targets. In fact, Satan launched his first weapon of mass destruction, one might say, in the garden of Eden when he enticed Eve to sin. Presenting himself to Eve as one concerned with helping Eve and her husband achieve ultimate fulfillment, he promised the first woman “your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (NKJV, Gen. 3:5). Satan, knowing that Adam and Eve would “surely die” (Gen. 3:4) when lured by his enticement, played the hypocrite. The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek *hypokrites* meaning “actor” (“Hypocrite”). Satan who “transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) is the ultimate hypocrite or “actor.” Satan “acted” as if he had Eve’s best interests at heart but, through his deception, achieved his goal of enticing humankind to sin against God.

Since that time, Satan has continued to use an arsenal of weapons in his quest to enslave humankind to sin and has continued to use hypocrisy as one of his most effective “weapons of mass destruction.” Just as today’s military personnel are trained to detect the presence of WMDs, to personally protect themselves from them, and to know how to “decontaminate” those affected by them, Christians fighting Satan and his forces on the front lines of spiritual battle must be thoroughly equipped to detect hypocrisy, to personally defend themselves from hypocrisy, and to work diligently

to help “decontaminate” those who have been affected by Satan’s pernicious weapon of spiritual mass destruction.

Detecting Hypocrisy

Togo West, former Secretary of the United States Army, referring to chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, stated, “[E]nemies know that chemicals can be stealthy, silent killers which could easily dissolve the U.S. conventional military advantage—not to mention shatter troop morale and willingness to fight” (Dickinson 42). Satan, likewise, seeks to stealthily and silently shatter the “troop morale” of Christian soldiers through the crippling effects of hypocrisy, and the first line of defense for us as soldiers of the cross is our keen awareness of hypocrisy’s existence.

A “hypocrite” is defined as “a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion” (“Hypocrite,” *Merriam-Webster*); more simply defined, it is “a person who pretends to have virtues or qualities that he or she does not have” (“Hypocrite,” *Merriam Webster Student*). Christ Himself, speaking to the multitudes and to His disciples, clearly defined hypocrisy by vividly portraying the most prominent hypocrites of His day—the scribes and the Pharisees. In Matthew 23:2-3, Christ told His followers, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.” Performing their works merely “to be seen by men,” these Pharisees are characterized by Christ as those who “love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues” (Mat. 23:6), “for a pretense make long prayers” (Mat. 23:14), and are full of “extortion and self-indulgence” (Mat. 23:25). Christ publicly denounced these so-called religious “leaders,” describing them as “whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful

outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Mat. 23:27). As noted earlier, Satan, in unleashing his first attack on humanity, took on the form of a serpent. Christ, here in Matthew 23, referred to these hypocritical Pharisees as "serpents" (Mat. 23:33), noting the destructive, poisonous effect of such hypocrisy. Christ clearly stated that not only will such "blind guides" (Mat. 23:16; Mat. 23:24) fail to enter the kingdom of heaven, but their followers will also be led astray:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in . . . Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (Mat. 23:13; Mat.23:15)

The Persistent Presence Of Hypocrisy

As we easily see from Scripture, Jesus Himself confronted hypocrisy among even the religious "leaders" of His day, and Satan continues to use the same weapon of hypocrisy against God's children today. As mothers, we know the unique heartache of seeing our children hurt when someone they have "put on a pedestal" falls from that position. Parents cannot shield their children from the inevitable disappointment of certain "heroes" exhibiting personal misconduct. When the New England Patriot's popular "All-American" Aaron Hernandez was charged with murder, the team officials offered to replace all Hernandez jerseys with

free jerseys from other team players. Of the over 2500 jerseys that were exchanged, more than 30% of them were youth-sized jerseys (Flam). Sadly, we as earthly parents must alert our children to the fact that “role models” are sometimes incorrectly chosen and are not always worthy of emulation. Even sadder, our Heavenly Father warns us, His children, that even some members and prominent leaders of the Lord’s church will not always be truly godly.

Before He left this earth, Christ warned His disciples to “beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Mat. 7:15). Christ continues in verses 21-23 to warn,

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Mat. 7:21-23)

Paul, through inspiration, also warned of the threat of hypocritical leaders who would hurt the Lord’s church: “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim. 3:1-5). In his own time, Paul dealt with those seeking to hurt the church, writing to the Corinthian Christians of hypocritical “ministers” and warning,

such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

The Potential Damage Of Hypocrisy

Weapons of mass destruction are called such because of their potential, despite their often low-visibility, for vast damage. With the detonation of a single nuclear bomb, for example, a person even six miles away from the detonation site can sustain third-degree burns, and the “fallout” of a single nuclear bomb exponentially widens the bomb’s damage. The radioactive materials seen in the initial “mushroom cloud” of a single nuclear bomb can enter and remain in the earth’s stratosphere for decades (“Effects”).

Satan’s weapon of hypocrisy is certainly no different in its far-reaching, long-term effects. Only God knows how many lost souls, because of disillusionment with the hypocritical lives of self-proclaimed followers of God, have never “darkened the door” of a worship assembly of the Lord’s church to hear the Word of God preached in honesty and simplicity. Paul warned of such effects when writing to the disobedient Jews:

You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery,”

do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:21-24)

Most of us know personally of once-zealous, faithful Christians who have left their walk with God after witnessing hypocrisy in church members and/or leaders. Sadly, just as with physical weapons of mass destruction, the damaging results of hypocrisy often do not end with that one casualty. Often there is the “mushroom” cloud effect, with subsequent generations also being hurt spiritually for years to come. I personally have a relative who was once “on fire” for the Lord but was so disillusioned with his congregation’s hypocritical leaders he no longer faithfully attends. Now, his adult children are no longer faithful and are not teaching their own young children about Christ and the church—the “mushroom effect.”

Personally Defending Against Hypocrisy

As Christian soldiers fighting on the front lines of the war against Satan and his forces, we, too, must not only be aware of Satan’s very real weapon of hypocrisy, but we must also be prepared to protect ourselves from the possibility of hypocrisy affecting our own lives. While we as Christians do not have literal “hazmat” suits, our “Commander in Chief” has given us all that we need to protect ourselves from the “fiery darts” (Eph. 6:16) of Satan:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against

powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph. 6:12-13)

Modern-day military strategists are keenly aware of the potential damage caused by microscopic pathogens, but, in times past, even doctors exposed their own patients to fatal diseases because of their misunderstanding of microscopic, contagious disease. One example, particularly touching to us as women, involves “child-bed fever,” an often-fatal infection occurring in women who had just given birth which was not considered contagious until the late 1800’s, even though some hospitals lost close to 100% of their new mothers to the fever (Powell). The physicians who first suggested the idea of microscopic disease transmission were ridiculed, but, as we know, these doctors’ findings proved to be accurate—**the doctors of that day were, through their own contamination, spreading the fatal “child-bed fever” to their own patients!** (Powell).

As Christian soldiers, not only are we commanded to defend against the wiles of the devil, but we are also given the divine mission of going out into the world to save lost souls. If we are “contaminated” with hypocrisy, Satan’s subtle, stealthy weapon, we, like those doctors who inadvertently transmitted fatal diseases to the very patients they were seeking to save, will be “contaminating,” so to speak, the lost souls we are seeking to save. Christ made this abundantly clear near the end of His Sermon on the Mount, teaching,

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Mat. 7:3-5)

To prevent hypocrisy in our own lives, we must regularly examine ourselves in the only mirror which will reveal "contaminants" not visible to the human eye—the mirror of God's Word (Jam. 1:21-26). Peter provides an excellent example to us of a frail human being whose heart remained open to both self-examination and correction from others. When confronted with wrongdoing by a fellow Christian, Peter displayed humility and a genuine desire to bring his actions into accordance with God's Will. Paul, through inspiration, records in Galatians 2:11-14 the account of how he openly confronted Peter for error he taught through his public example to the Christians at Antioch:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so

that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? . . . For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”

Peter would, years following Paul’s rebuke, describe his fellow apostle Paul as “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15), so, we see by implication, Peter reacted to Paul’s correction with an open, honest, and humble heart. How often have we seen “prominent” Christians who, unlike Peter, when rebuked for personal errors in their lives by loving fellow Christians, become defensive, angry, and, in the process, hurt their own souls and the souls of others through their hypocrisy?

In order to avoid such hypocrisy in our own lives, we must continuously examine ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word and be ready and willing to change any aspect of our lives that we see is not in accordance with the will of God. James noted the inconsistency, for example, when a Christian both blesses God and curses men with his or her tongue, writing, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? . . . Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh” (Jam. 3:10-12). This same line of reasoning could be applied to all other aspects of our lives: Do we use our eyes to read God’s Word and then also use them to view vulgarity and profanity in our entertainment choices; do we sing “Yield not to temptation”

in our worship assembly but dress immodestly, tempting our brethren to lust after us; do we claim to be “Christians first” but allow sports, leisure activities, or careers to take priority over spiritual pursuits? James noted that the best defense for this inconsistency in the lives of men is the application of the wisdom of God rather than the “wisdom” of man:

Who is wise and understanding among you? . . . This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But **the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.** (Jam. 3:13-17, emphasis CR)

“Decontaminating” Those Affected By Hypocrisy *Those Affected In The World*

Just as he did in the garden of Eden, Satan, the ultimate hypocrite or “actor,” pretends to present ultimate joy, fulfillment, and pleasure to those in the world while truly seeking to lead their souls into eternal hell. He continues to deceive the world as he “transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). As Christian soldiers, we must reach out to those in the world who are deceived by Satan and show them the hypocrisy of Satan and the contrasting genuine, sacrificial love of God. We must shine God’s light to expose Satan clearly for who he truly is, “the ruler of this world,” and show lost souls that “all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the

Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Those Affected In The Church

Satan’s use of hypocrisy, however, is perhaps most damaging within the church. Knowing the effect of hypocrisy “within the ranks,” so to speak, Satan seeks to demoralize large numbers of Christians by the unique disillusionment and disappointment brought on when hypocrisy is witnessed in fellow members. Many of us, as the wives of elders, deacons, preachers, and missionaries, have a more intimate knowledge of our congregation’s problems and are more connected to “brotherhood news.” For this reason, our children and grandchildren are more likely to be aware of the hypocrisy that exists in the brotherhood, and we must be keenly aware of helping ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren guard against the demoralizing effects of hypocrisy.

In dealing with biological weapons of mass destruction, experts note that “it remains very difficult to transform a deadly virus or bacterium into a weapon that can be effectively dispersed” (Onion et al.). Sadly, through today’s social media, Satan has found a highly effective means for disseminating the powerful weapon of hypocrisy. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other media provide a unique opportunity for our children to have an “inside” look at the lives of vast numbers of their fellow Christians, and, sadly, this often means that they will be privy to sinful behaviors in the lives of those “who should know better.” After seeing a Facebook post by a fellow Christian, I have heard Christian teenagers, more than once, downheartedly remark, “We’ve now lost faith in all humanity!” The psalmist David alluded to the uniquely intense pain brought on by the inconstancy of fellow followers of God:

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. **We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.** (Psa. 55:12; emphasis CR)

We pray that all of us will always have hearts ready and willing to accept admonition from our Christian brothers and sisters who point out error and inconsistency in our lives. However, when some stubbornly refuse to conform every aspect of their lives to God's Word, we must remind ourselves and, especially, our young Christians that **our faith never was or is in humanity—our faith rests securely in our unchanging God and our eternal King, Jesus Christ.** We must understand and explain Christ's parable of the dragnet to those who are discouraged by hypocrisy within the church. We read these words of Christ in Matthew 13:47-50:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

In this parable, Christ symbolically portrays the gospel as being “cast” into the world, “the sea.” Many are gathered into this “net,” the church, but, Christ explains, when the net is drawn to the “shore,” symbolic of the judgment, the “wicked” must be separated “from among the just.” Christians must be “vaccinated” against Satan’s use of hypocrisy within the church by a clear understanding and even an expectation that, at times, the “wicked” will be found within the church, “among the just.”

In Revelation 3, Christ’s words of rebuke to the Lord’s church at Sardis provide not only a warning of the possibility of hypocrisy in the lives of us as Christians but also, on a positive note, assure genuine followers that true faith can be maintained even in the presence of such hypocrisy:

And to the angel of the church in Sardis write . . . “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. **You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I**

will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” (Rev. 3:1-5; emphasis CR)

Conclusion

Paul, in writing to the Corinthian Christians, spoke of Satan, saying, “For we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). From his crafty deceit in the garden of Eden to today, Satan has continuously used hypocrisy as a weapon of spiritual mass destruction. The profound discouragement caused by hypocrisy “within the ranks” of the Lord’s army has caused many Christian soldiers to abandon their positions. Christians facing similar discouragement would do well to recall the prophet Elijah who, **because of outright persecution from those who claimed to be the people of God**, found himself alone, sleeping in a cave:

[B]ehold the word of The Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” So he said, “I have been very zealous for The Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life. (1 Kings 19:13-14)

A few verses later, God assured lonely Elijah, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). Elijah was not truly alone! We, too, can find strength in realizing that, though we may feel alone at times when facing hypocrisy among God’s own people, faithful

followers are serving God around the world and have not “bowed the knee to Baal.”

Our ultimate assurance, however, comes from our knowledge that, even if all were to abandon genuine obedience and service to God, we are never truly alone because our unchanging God will never leave us. Unlike Satan, the ultimate “actor,” and unlike humankind who often fall prey to similar pretense, “Jesus Christ is the **same yesterday, today, and forever**” (Heb.13:8; emphasis CR). We as Christians are blessed to serve “the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning**” (Jam. 1:17; emphasis CR) so that we may “boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:6).

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Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Materialism

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I saw a butterfly hovering over the roses. Her colors were stunning! It is always a blessing to see one of God's beautiful tiny creatures at work doing just what it was created to do. Several days later, I was at the roses again and what I saw was not a pretty sight. A rather large spider had spun a web the day before. The butterfly I saw earlier had inadvertently flown into the web and was entangled. She was not alive. The spider was at work doing what God created it to do. While it might seem strange talking about spiders and their webs, they actually give a very vivid image of what happens when materialism entangles a person and chokes out the precious Savior who gave His life for lost souls.

The spider web does not suddenly appear. It grows strand by strand, forming a beautiful lacework web. When

the sun bursts out, it takes on a shimmering glow, and when rain spreads a mist over it, it resembles more a work of art than a deadly trap. The same is true with materialism. When we were small children, we were content playing with the box and ribbon in which the Christmas gift was wrapped. As we grew older, the world became more enticing. Now we want everything! The riches, possessions, and worldly things look lovely. We rationalize, Good things come to good people, and God surely wants us to have the best. Worse yet, we begin indoctrinating our children with the desire to have things. Parents give and give, justifying their indulgences saying, I want my children to have more than I had as a child. Before long we and our precious families are caught in the web of materialism. The sad fact is, if we do not pull ourselves out of the snare, out of the web, we will lose the spiritual life blood, the blood of Christ, that saves our souls!

Defining Materialism

What is materialism? For the purposes of our study, materialism is defined as “the preoccupation with material things rather than intellectual or spiritual things” (“Materialism”). The definition itself reveals that materialism is juxtaposed to the Christian walk. Anything that takes our focus, money, time, and energy away from the Lord is not a good thing. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength (NKJV, Deu. 6:5). This is, according to Jesus in Matthew 22:37-38, the first and greatest commandment. Anything we love more than God is an idol, and He hates idolatry.

Riches And Possessions

Are possessions and money the problem? No. Possessions and money are neutral, neither good nor bad. The problem

lies in the heart of a person. Scripture reveals many godly men and women who were wealthy but maintained a solid relationship with the Lord. “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). His servant told Laban that the Lord had blessed Abraham greatly with flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels, and much more (Gen. 24:35). Isaac was likewise blessed. In the midst of a famine, Isaac went to the land of Gerar of the Philistines and sowed grain. He received a hundredfold and grew until he became very great, with possession of flocks and herds, and a great store of servants (Gen. 26:12-14). After Jacob returned to Canaan, he and Esau’s riches were more than the land could sustain, so Esau moved to Edom (Gen. 36:6-8). Perhaps no one could compare to Solomon, who “passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (2 Chr. 9:22).

In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man who used his wealth to give our Lord a proper burial. Nicodemus also gave generously to anoint Jesus’ body with a hundred pounds of costly myrrh and aloes. Lydia was likely a wealthy woman because she was a seller of expensive purple fabric that few could own. She, too, used her wealth to serve God’s people. Here lies the distinction. These wealthy men and women were not concerned about themselves, but about how to use their wealth and possessions to serve the Lord.

Unfortunately, some today preach the health and wealth gospel, and there are unfortunate ones who believe their false doctrine. They wrongly assert that God’s promises to bless Abraham and other biblical men are promises for all of His children. What He did for the patriarchs, He will do for us today. They proclaim that poverty is a curse, and we, His children, have been redeemed from the curse (“Biblical Prosperity”). Perhaps they failed to read James words, “Listen

my beloved brethren; Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (Jam. 2:5).

Is it a sin to be rich? No, but God places restrictions and responsibilities on the rich. In 1 Timothy 6:17-18, Paul instructed the wealthy,

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.

God blesses some with riches in order to test them spiritually. That was certainly the case with God's people in the wilderness. Then the Lord said to Moses,

Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. (Exo. 16:4)

He also tested them when He provided water (Exo. 15:25-26).

The Poor And Their Possessions

Can a poor man fall into sin because of his lack of possessions and money? Yes, because the root of the problem is the heart. The one talent man is a good example (Mat. 25:25). He determined to avoid the risk of losing the one talent the master gave him. Instead, he buried it. The Lord was not

pleased and condemned him to eternal darkness where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:30). A poor man can allow greed, jealousy, bitterness, covetousness, and other sinful attitudes of the heart to rob him of his peace and hope in Christ. He can also be so careful with his few possessions that he refuses to help others. Solomon said,

Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, “Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God. (Pro. 30:7-9)

Jesus Had Much To Say

What did Jesus say about materialism and all the ungodliness it spawns? Our Lord delivered about thirty-eight parables in the gospels. Out of the thirty-eight, sixteen have to do with money or possessions. Jesus said, “Life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

Jesus instructed,

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

A few verses later Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). He referred to money as a ‘master’ that we serve at the expense of serving God. Jesus likened the ‘love of money’ to idolatry. We are commanded by God to have ‘no other gods’ before us except the only true and living God (Exo. 20:3).

Jesus said the Gentiles worry about what they shall eat, or drink, or wear, but His disciples are to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mat. 6:33).

Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler is one of the most graphic illustrations of materialism’s web in all of Scripture (Mat. 19:16-22). The young man asked the Lord what he must do to obtain eternal life. Jesus told him to follow the commandments. When he told Jesus that he had done all that, he asked Jesus what else he lacked. Our Lord told him to sell all his possessions and give it to the poor and to follow Him, thereby testing his ability to obey the first commandment. The young man would not do this. Sadly, he did not own his riches; his riches owned him!

Following Jesus’ discussion with the young ruler, He spoke to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (ESV, Mat. 19:23-24). Riches produce independence. The independent person has no need to rely on anyone, let alone God. Jesus went on to explain that it was difficult but not impossible: “With God all things are possible” (Mat. 19:26).

In the Lord’s parable of the sower, He described the seed that was scattered on thorny ground, “and the cares of

this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). The world wants us to believe that if we have the right gadgetry, the newest technology, the finest house, and the latest car, we will finally be happy. Fueled by Satan, worldly riches and possessions deceive us. Instead of satisfaction, we find ourselves in constant need to feed our appetite, only to realize we will never be full.

The Effects Of Materialism

What effect does materialism have on families? A high percentage of divorces are brought on because of financial pressure in the home (McGraw). Materialism prompts couples to buy too much on credit and subsequently have to work longer hours or take a second job to pay the credit card bills. Parents fall into the web of materialism, and it soon causes parental absenteeism. Their lack of presence and guidance brings a host of temptations for children and teens. Materialism takes the family’s focus off God. School, sports, music, or art lessons can be material things that virtually soak up all of the downtime children have outside of school. Parents justify the activity by saying these things will help their children have the best college education. However, what is the end result? Our souls and the souls of our loved ones are in jeopardy. No time is left in our busy day-to-day schedule to squeeze in family Bible study. We become malnourished as concerns the bread of life, God’s Word. There is merit to the acronym B.U.S.Y., which means Being Under Satan’s Yoke.

What effect has materialism had on the family of God? When parents struggle with time constraints, usually the first casualty is church attendance/activities. I asked a woman recently, “Are your kids going to participate in Lads

to Leaders this year?” She said, “No. They have so many activities. Between soccer, softball, gymnastics, and school activities, something had to go.” She went on, “I told them they were going to have to discontinue something and they picked Lads to Leaders. We just cannot do everything!” Her words took me by surprise and I did not know how to respond. In hindsight, I should have said, “The only activity that has eternal consequences is the planting of God’s Word in the minds of her children, and it should take priority.” Next time, I will be prepared to answer.

What effect has materialism had on our nation? Our affluent nation is comprised of men and women who are quick to accommodate every perceived need. We see, we want, we buy, and then crave more. When we run out of places to put all of our stuff, we simply rent a storage unit. Did you know that the self-storage business is a \$24 billion industry in our country, offering 2.3 billion square feet of storage (Clark)? Materialism entices people to spend more than they can pay. Consequently, they have to work longer hours or get second jobs. This leaves children without necessary parental supervision/instruction, which precipitates a national moral decline. Sadly, our nation virtually leads the way when it spends much more than was allotted for the national budget. The national debt has skyrocketed, primarily because politicians, like parents, do not know how to say no.

The Bible Has Much To Say

What does the Bible say about materialism? The Bible offers more than 2,000 verses on money. In contrast, there are a thousand combined for prayer and faith (Laurie). It appears that God put great emphasis on understanding the proper way to use possessions and money.

Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven. (Pro. 23:4)

Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God. (Pro. 30:8-9)

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. (Ecc. 5:10)

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (Phi. 4:11-12)

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (1 Tim. 6:6)

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb. 13:5)

How To Fix The Problem

In order to fix the problem of materialism, we must first acknowledge that everything belongs to God. We own nothing. "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein" (Psa. 24:1).

Second, acknowledge that God is in control. "For all that is in heaven and earth is Yours" (1 Chr. 29:11). God is in control of everything—riches, honor, power, might, greatness, strength, and our very existence. "In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?" (Job 12:10). God is in control of nations and rulers of nations and gives them to whomever He chooses (Dan. 4:17).

Third, acknowledge that God has promised He will provide for our needs (Mat. 6:25-34). In short, Jesus instructed us to not worry. Look at the birds. God cares for their needs. Worry will not change anything for the good. Look at the lilies of the field. They do not toil or

spin, yet God has adorned them more gloriously than Solomon. If God clothes the grass, will he not much more clothe you?

Fourth, replace material things with spiritual things. Replace anxiety with trust. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths” (Pro. 3:5).

Fifth, develop an attitude of gratitude and thankfulness. When one concentrates on all the blessings that he or she receives, it changes the focus from self to God. “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psa. 100:4). “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phi. 4:6-7).

Sixth, develop the finer virtues. “Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness love” (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

Seventh, replace worldly desires and actions with godly attributes. Paul explained that the transformation begins when we put on Christ in baptism. After being immersed, we emerge a new man or woman

who is renewed in knowledge according
to the image of Him who created him . . .
Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and
beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness,
humility, meekness, longsuffering;
bearing with one another, and forgiving

one another... But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts. (Col. 3:10-15)

The transformation, however, is an ongoing process. Paul told Christians to put away sinful attitudes and actions,

Put to death ungodly desires: Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Col. 3:5)

Paul told them to replace these things by putting on “tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col. 3:12-14).

Eighth, change focus and imitate Jesus. Peter said,

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.’ (1 Pet. 2:21-22)

The writer to the Hebrews said,

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight,

and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. (Heb. 12:1-2)

Ninth, change actions. Instead of serving self, serve others. When one follows in Jesus' steps, he or she will become a servant. When our Lord washed the disciples' feet in the upper room, He placed great emphasis on attending to the needs of others (John 13:14-15). Jesus made it abundantly clear that serving others will affect our destiny. When He comes in His glory, He will judge us based on whether we fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, extended hospitality to the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and visited ones in prison (Mat. 25:31-46).

The Web Of Materialism

Christians should always be aware of the perils of materialism. Like the butterfly, we can quickly become entangled in the web of materialism, and the tragic consequences are eternal. May we never forget that riches and possessions are empty. If materialism was ever to satisfy anyone, it would have been King Solomon. He was the richest king the world has ever known. He had absolutely everything and had more of it than anyone, yet he found it was all worthless. It did not produce lasting happiness or satisfaction. He declared that the most important thing in life is to "fear God, and keep His commandments. For this is man's all" (Ecc. 12:13).

God made us and knows how we tick. He knows that if He possesses our hearts, He has all of us, which includes our money and possessions, whether great or small. Our

ultimate fulfillment then will come not with material things, but by wholly dedicating ourselves to knowing, fearing, and obeying our awesome God!

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Immodesty

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Modesty in the faithful, reverent child of God is, at all times and in all situations, a regard for decency of behavior, speech, and dress, accompanied by humility and lack of vanity. God's directive to women, in particular, through Paul's inspired pen, is that they "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good

works” (NKJV, 1 Tim. 2:9-10). Reverent older women are to teach the younger “to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands” (Tit. 2:4). Modesty, of course, characterizes such godly women.

However, God’s will is that **all** Christians “be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Peter goes on to record qualities of eternal value which every Christian should display and develop: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. The fruitful spiritual life, whether one is male or female, will be reflected in one’s modest, humble, consistent walk of faith in the light of the Lord. Peter reminds us we have no idea when the Lord will return, when “both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”; then, he asks the rhetorical question: “Therefore . . . what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness ?” (2 Pet. 3:10-11). It is apparent the “holy conduct and godliness” required of every Christian must be associated with modesty.

The antithesis of modesty is immodesty; and if modesty is characteristic of godliness, immodesty is characteristic of that which is ungodly. In dress, it may be sexually provocative and indecent; in behavior, that which is lewd, crude, or arrogant and boastful; in speech, that which is profane or suggestive. Immodesty even may be a matter of “pretentious or ostentatious” materialism—the desire for “things,” their acquisition and self-aggrandizing display (“Immodest”).

Immodesty in any aspect of life is only a symptom of a far greater problem—an eternal life-threatening, spiritual health problem.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the
Father is not in him. For all that is in the

world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

The lust and pride characterizing Satan’s iniquitous realm of influence reflect themselves in immodesty—the companion of immorality, indecency, and idolatry. Paul says, “The Lord knows those who are His . . . Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

A Public Health Concern

Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations. (“Public Health”)

The church functions to prevent “hearing loss” and “heart disease” in its members, and to promote spiritual health and well-being within the population into which it carries its life-giving message of salvation. The church is an organized effort, designed and implemented by Deity, to deal with public spiritual health—with the epidemic of ignorance and iniquity plaguing contemporary society. The disease is associated with hearing and heart problems, and one distinguishing symptom is immodesty.

Paul says the Lord will return “from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 The. 1:7-8). Those who do not know God—the ignorant—may display immodest behavior, dress, or speech because they do not know the will of the Father. Those who do not obey—those who are immoral or indifferent, heedless and unloving toward God—usually reflect immodesty in one or more of its aspects. In either situation, God will pronounce upon them the wrath of judgment.

Christians must “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mat. 6:33). This spiritual prioritizing always has required sacrifice, selflessness, and love for God and one’s fellow man. One seeks to serve and please the Father while reaching out to any and all with the benevolence and concern of *agape*. The ignorance and iniquity of societies through the ages have made this mission of God’s people frequently difficult and sometimes dangerous. Spiritual famine, historically, has been common, as God, said of Israel: “I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). Hearts, also, become hardened by sin and inured to the darkness and depravity of sin in the culture at large.

In our “free” and “Christian” nation, God’s people, who seek to shield themselves from society’s pervasive profanity and immodesty, are among those frequently considered worthy of contempt for their “narrow-mindedness.” There seems to be little appreciation for the desire to defend oneself spiritually, to keep one’s thoughts and conscience pure from the worldliness impinging on one at every turn. In the society at large—and sometimes even within the church, Satan reaches his sinewy black hand of iniquity: Marriage

has been devalued and corrupted. The divorce rate is down, because the rate of cohabitation—that is, biblical “whore-mongering”—is up. Sexual promiscuity is a given and sexual purity is for “losers” among much of the teenage population, where “hooking up” is normal, popular recreation, but date rape, a common complaint. The media cater to prurient, deviant curiosity and behaviors—fornication, adultery, “LGBT” activities—all kinds of sinfulness now “politically-correct” and not due criticism or condemnation. Televised are mothers and their sexualized toddlers, “made up” and coached as provocative sirens, with no abhorrence for what is clearly abuse of children little more than babies—all for the transference of fame, if not fortune, to their parents.

Yes, immodesty is prevalent in our society; but at the root of it all is iniquity, whether of ignorance, indifference, immorality, or idolatry. The child of God must not be complacent, lest, like the frog in the kettle, he gradually boils to (spiritual) death, in the ever-increasing heat of worldly influence. One must take up the defensive armor of God and “go on offense” with the sword of the Spirit, determining to “preserve, protect, and defend” the Word of God, the way of godliness, and souls over whom one has influence. God’s woman is one of modesty, and God’s man is one of honor. And, in God’s family, every member respects the other and recognizes a responsibility to assist the other, through the narrow gate, on the difficult way through this world, to the glorious gate of pearl opening on the golden way to God.

The Purity Of Godliness

Purity, modesty, and honorable reputation are inseparable qualities: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8). “Do not . . . share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). “To the pure all

things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled” (Tit.1:15). “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

The Lord condemns evil speaking, which would include immodesty of speech:

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. (Mat. 12:34-37)

And Paul wrote to the Ephesians about unclean language:

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Eph. 5:3-5)

The Lord also condemns the immodesty displayed by arrogant pride or extravagant materialism:

What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man. (Mark 7:20-23)

It seems the “certain rich man” of Luke 12 displayed foolish pride and materialism, when he declared:

I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ (Luke 12:18-19)

Of course, God declared to the “barn-builder”: “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you” (Luke 12:18-20).

And there is the immodesty of extravagance and ostentation, perhaps of inappropriate actions or attire that draw attention to the “package” of the person, rather than to the character and godly qualities of the precious soul within. Peter tells wives:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle

and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (1 Pet. 3:3-4)

But, contrary to God's revealed will, there is immodesty and shamelessness in contemporary dress that seem to have reached the maximum degree of carnality—and of minimal “coverage.” *USA Today* reported in June, 2014:

It's a brave nude world. Rihanna and Miley push the limits on showing celebrity skin, but now real people are getting into the act, baring all Adam-and-Eve-style on television, with only blurry digital fig leaves. . . . When survivalist series *Naked and Afraid* debuted on Discovery Channel last year, the series raised eyebrows and intrigued viewers as the highest-rated series premiere in the network's history. And you know what that means: Copycats and clones were quickly ordered up . . . *Buying Naked* . . . focuses on a real-estate agent who works in Florida nudist communities. And . . . *Dating Naked*, putting all the mystery that's usually saved for later and in the dark on display from the first moment these couples meet. (Oldenburg)

This is the degree of depravity and indecency to which media have sunk in a society where prurient interests are alive and ravenous, but souls are languishing and dying because of famine of the Word of God.

God's "seed sowers" must seek good soil, cultivate and fertilize it, plant the seed, and pray for life-changing fruitfulness. Only when hearts are transported from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God, only when souls are transformed by the Word, conformed to the mind of Christ, and made to partake of God's nature, will there be conviction and determination to be modest and pure in thought, word, deed, and dress.

Practical Suggestions: Appearance

God's Word gives us practical guidance in determining modest dress for those who would be pleasing before God. Our late brother Franklin Camp would advise going to the first mention of a word or concept in Scriptures, to gain much valuable information and understanding. The first mention of clothing is in Genesis 3, after sin brought to Adam and Eve the recognition of their nakedness; they felt shame before God, and they clothed themselves in "aprons" of fig leaves. God, obviously, did not consider their effort sufficient: "For Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). *Strong's Concordance* says these tunics, *kethoneth*, were shirts, garments, or robes; and the word is related to another, *katheph*, "From an unused root meaning to clothe; the shoulder (proper, i.e., upper end of the arm; as being the spot where the garments hang)" (Strong). It is apparent God intended the "nakedness" of Adam and Eve to be covered sufficiently only when the garment reached from shoulder to knee.

This coverage is confirmed by God's directive to Moses for the covering of Aaron and his sons:

For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics,
and you shall make sashes for them. And

you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty. So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests. And you shall make for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach from the waist to the thighs. They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place, that they do not incur iniquity and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and his descendants after him. (Exo. 28:40-43)

Should the priests of God under the New Testament dispensation be any less concerned for glorifying God and appearing spiritually beautiful and modest before Him?

In his prophecy against Babylon, Isaiah wrote: “Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon . . . you shall no more be called tender and delicate. . . . Remove your veil, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh . . . Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame will be seen” (Isa. 47:1-3). Apparently, God considers the uncovered thigh area to be “nakedness” and a “shame.” Our society has become so desensitized to over-exposure, this might seem a rather “innocent” state of undress. But “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Pet. 1:24-25). With what Scriptural support may a Christian say, I don’t think it’s immodest to bare the

thigh? The Word of God endures, and the biblical guideline of shoulder to knee coverage remains unchanged. Also, it seems, the exposure of the thigh is reserved for the privacy and sanctity of marriage; the Beloved speaks of his wife: “How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince’s daughter! The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful workman” (S. of Sol. 7:1). One might say, Well, customs of dress and standards of modesty have changed over the course of time. In part, this is true—customs and styles of dress vary with culture and society; but God’s Word sets standards related to the flesh exposed, not necessarily to the style of garment covering it. Modest dress covers one from shoulder to knee, taking care to cover the thighs.

We live in a time when, if a standard of modesty is even considered, it allows an extensive area of bodily exposure; and frequently, immodest clothing is tightly form-fitting and seductive. The Christian must be concerned about applying God’s standard and about pleasing Him: by covering the upper and lower body sufficiently; by wearing nothing that draws attention to one’s sexuality or sexual anatomy; by being appropriately dressed and neither so simple and plain or so elaborate and “showy” as to draw undue attention to “self.” At times in societal history, “modesty” has gone beyond God’s standard—for example, when decent women did not expose their ankles. Christian women of that era would have abided by the “norms” of society, or they would have given the appearance of being worldly and of ill repute. Always must the Christian consider, first and foremost, his or her standing and appearance before God; for “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). But also, as a child of God, one must consider one’s appearance and influence before the world.

Men are to be—and appear—masculine; and women are to be—and appear—feminine. But to draw attention to one’s sexuality, or to specific anatomical male or female features, is a privilege reserved only for those in the union of scriptural marriage. Only within the sanctified bond of marriage may a Christian man and woman assume the rights and benefits of physical intimacy—both procreation and pleasure, faithfully keeping themselves solely to each other, while maintaining and growing in spiritual purity before God. The husband is a man of honor and integrity, and the wife is a woman of modesty and propriety. Godly women will be concerned always about their appropriate, moderate appearance and conduct—attributes of a beautiful character that may even win a non-Christian husband to the Savior: “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear” (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Reverence and respect for God at all times is a hallmark of discipleship. As recorded in John 21, when Jesus spoke to the fishermen-disciples from the shore and John told Peter it was the Lord speaking, it seems significant that Peter “put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.” The King James Version records: “When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea” (John 21:7). The commentator B. W. Johnson notes:

Peter, impulsive as usual, when he heard it [John’s announcement, “It is the Lord!"], at once plunged into the sea in order to reach the shore. During the night’s work, he had laid off his ‘fisher’s coat,’ a kind of

loose blouse, and counting it unseemly
to appear before the Savior half clad, he
put it on. (309)

Also, F. C. Cook comments:

He could not wait for the slow progress
of the boat, but with swift resolve 'cast
himself into the sea' . . . having first 'girt
his coat (. . . an upper garment . . .) about
him,' with instinctive reverence for the
presence of his Master. (301)

Apparently, Peter, out of respect for the Lord and even in
his haste to go to Him, was mindful of the modesty of the
apparel in which he appeared before the Master and put on
his garment, covering his bare shoulders and torso.

How frequently mindless many of us seem to be, even on
the Lord's Day, when we come into His courts inappropriately
or immodestly dressed—for example, men in tee-shirts
and shorts, perhaps, with shirts emblazoned with slogans
appropriate, if any time or place, at a picnic—or women in
backless sundresses with plunging necklines or short, slit
skirts, appropriate only in privacy with one's husband and,
certainly, never in worship to God. David said God deserves
and demands respect:

For You are not a God who takes plea-
sure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell
with You. The boastful shall not stand
in Your sight; You hate all workers of
iniquity. . . . But as for me, I will come
into Your house in the multitude of

Your mercy; in fear of You I will worship
toward Your holy temple. (Psa. 5:4-7)

Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.” God’s child, who has understanding of appropriate, decent dress and a desire to please the Father, should “enter into His gates” with reverence, prepared to worship in spirit and in truth and attired in appropriate, adequate clothing.

Practical Suggestions: Appetite

Are we feeding on manna or media? The Lord said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mat. 5:6). God’s Word is food from heaven for hungry souls. But far too often, men, women, and children are spiritually undernourished or malnourished, with far too little feeding on the Word and far too much feeding on television, Internet, music, social media, and all other technological media and devices that bring the world into our homes, ears, and minds. “You are what you eat” has been a popular saying for many years; spiritually-speaking, it is very true. Paul said:

Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Phi. 4:8)

As Christians, we must be vigilant, on guard for the spiritual well-being of our children and ourselves, prepared

to “tune out,” “turn off,” or unplug the corruptive influences. Also, to the best of our abilities, we must insulate ourselves and our families with the Word of God, the shield of faith because:

The media’s assault on our kids’ innocence has become increasingly explicit and intrusive. From TV to movies, from music to the Internet, popular culture saturates kids’ lives. The messages are sometimes blatant (such as the celebration of premarital sex) and sometimes subtle (such as disrespect for parents and other authorities). And what kids don’t get from the media, they hear at school, often in explicit sex-education courses. (Dalphonzo)

Regular Bible study, involvement in Christian worship and service with a faithful congregation, and living to please God 24/7 should be the priorities of every Christian and his family. Some families feel they function more efficiently and get better results as sheltering “home-schoolers”; others, by choice or necessity, labor to be spiritual “lighthouses” in a public and often challenging world. Whatever the circumstances, God’s will can be achieved with resolve and strength of conviction—with prayer and perseverance. We can be God’s humble, obedient children—moral and modest, “blameless and harmless . . . without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Phi. 2: 15-16).

Immodesty—The Problem Of Lust

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mat. 22:37-39). Every Christian has a responsibility to every other to provide edification and encouragement on the strait way to heaven—and to love with *agape*, the love of God commanded by Him. Seeking the best for every unique and precious soul made in God’s image, one would suffer want and affliction oneself, rather than allow another to be in peril or distress. Particularly, Peter tells us: “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). We are to have fervent love in our hearts for one another—not fervent lust; the Lord said, “I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mat. 5:28). The man has a responsibility to shield his mind from the temptation to lust; the woman, also, has a responsibility not to behave, dress, or speak in such a way as to provoke, purposefully or possibly, any lustful response in the man.

It seems many women feel they must choose clothing that is fashionable, without regard for what it reveals or suggests. Sometimes it seems, perhaps, due to the influence of media’s images or perhaps simply because of vanity and pride, they comport themselves in a way to invite or imply sexual interest. These cannot be Christian women who love as God commands, with regard for the welfare of the souls of others. In Matthew 18, Jesus speaks of the terrible nature of any action that causes another to sin. Christian men and women have a very serious obligation before God to help,

not hinder, spirituality in our brothers and sisters—or for that matter, in any other person.

The early “church father,” John Chrysostom spoke to the immodesty of his time:

You carry your snare everywhere and spread your nets in all places. You allege that you never invited others to sin. You did not indeed, by your words, but you have done so by your dress and your deportment . . . When you have made another sin in his heart, how can you be innocent? Tell me, whom does this world condemn? Whom do judges punish? Those who drink poison or those who prepare it and administer the fatal potion? You have prepared the abominable cup, you have given the death dealing drink, and you are more criminal than are those who poison the body; you murder not the body but the soul. And it is not to enemies you do this, nor are you urged on by any imaginary necessity, nor provoked by injury, but out of foolish vanity and pride.

God’s woman must refrain from any appearance that would reflect negatively upon her virtue and Christian character and that possibly would cause a normal man to have improper thoughts. Likewise, God’s man must refrain from exposing himself to any images or activities that might impinge harmfully upon the purity of mind he knows God desires. Men who serve communion in worship should not

have to be concerned about preserving reverent thought, when, in the pews, revealing hemlines expose bare thighs. As worshipers and guests leave the assembly and pass by greeters at the doors, the only thoughts and expressions should be welcome and appreciation, rather than amazement and concern for the boldness of one who would expose such an indecent amount of “flesh” in the presence of God. Jesus said, “Love the Lord” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If we follow both commandments, we will be modest.

Immodesty—The Plan For Defeat

Modesty and honor are lacking in the world of Satan, and the borders of his kingdom seem to be expanding at an alarming rate. Christians—parents, families, congregations—must be concerned and active in being and producing women of modesty and men of honor, who have the strength of character, conviction, and courage to maintain their integrity in the face of persecution and peer pressure. Nurturing, admonishing fathers and loving, caring mothers need to establish stable homes with rules and standards of behavior based on the principles of God—and this discipline must be consistent and enforced, with monitoring of influences and associations. Far too many young people are trying to find identity and to make choices without direction, without parents who love and care for them enough to know their problems and challenges, and who are ignorant of the one true source of guidance, God’s Word. And far too many parents themselves lead directionless lives that are spiritual shambles. They may have little time or inclination to get involved in the lives of their children, who may look for love and meaning in the wrong places and ways with the wrong people. Loss of innocence and lack of trust may lead to misery, or perhaps self-loathing and destructiveness—not

only immodest behaviors, but promiscuity, cruelty, anorexia, bulimia, cutting, and drug abuse.

God, through the prophet Hosea, said: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos. 4:6). We, the people of God, have His directive: “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deu. 6:6-7). We also have the charge and responsibility to all souls: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mat. 5:14). We are to pray and seek to “lead a quiet and peaceable life.” This life should be lived “in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:2). And we are to be occupied with educating, evangelizing, and encouraging all souls to live modest, honorable, godly lives before their Creator, Sustainer, and Judge, “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:2-4).

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