

# The End Of Time



Hosted by the  
Southaven Church of Christ  
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Don Blackwell  
Lectureship Director

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# Dedication

## To Luther and Kitty Davis



Solomon wrote, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Pro. 18:22). Seventy-five years ago Luther Davis did just that.

Luther and Kitty Davis met in 1941 in Columbia, South Carolina, at the Fort Jackson U.S. Army base. Sergeant Davis worked in supply and was responsible for taking the uniforms to the laundry to be cleaned. A young clerk named Kitty checked him in. They soon went on their first date to see a movie, and less than six months later they were married on March 13, 1942. Both were twenty-one years old. Within five months, Luther was sent to Europe (Belgium, France, and England) for three years. They communicated by letter until he returned home.

Luther was a member of the Lord’s church and converted Kitty who was raised a Methodist. They have been active and faithful members of the Southaven congregation since October of 1999. Prior to that, they faithfully served the Lord as members of the Lake Forest church of Christ. Their

kindness and loving concern for others has been a constant source of encouragement to all who know them. Although they have both experienced a number of health issues over the past several years, their strong determination to be able to assemble to worship has certainly been a wonderful example and an inspiration to all of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is with great pleasure that the elders of the Southaven congregation dedicate this book in their honor. This most-deserving couple has reached a milestone that few ever do. They are a shining example of steadfastness in marriage at a time in which we so badly need it. Luther and Kitty, we love and appreciate you!

The Eldership of Southaven church of Christ,  
Don Blackwell, Larry Cox, Larry Everson, Con Lambert,  
Mark Teske, and Vern Schrimsher



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# Preparing For Eternity

## *Robert Jefferies*



Robert Jefferies is a native of Memphis, Tennessee. He is married to the former Blair McCall, also of Memphis. They have three children: Aylin, Hilton, and Weston. Robert has done local work in McMinnville, Tennessee, where he served as a minister for the Smyrna congregation from 2002-2007. He also taught Bible and coached high school basketball and baseball for Boyd Christian School. Since 2007 he has served as one of the ministers for the Southaven congregation in Southaven, Mississippi.

### **Introduction**

My love and affection continues to grow stronger and stronger with each passing year for the church at Southaven. For the past nine years I have been blessed to serve as one of her ministers and it has truly enriched my life as well as my family. This year's theme centers around *The End Of Time*. This lesson is designed to help lay the foundation for our theme as we think about being prepared for the end of time as we center our attention around one specific question. However, before we consider that question, let's consider the importance of making preparations.

People make preparations in all areas of life. For example; teachers prepare weeks in advance for the first day of school. They make lesson plans, decorate their classrooms, study, arrange seating assignments, make supply lists, and the list goes on and on. When football season rolls around, coaches have prepared long before the first game is to be played. There will be practices, scheming, film watching, all in order to defeat their opponent. In business, there will be professionals who prepare for meetings long before the

meetings actually start, making sure every “i” is dotted and “t” is crossed. Preachers prepare for their sermons before they get up to preach, often times putting hours of study into them. Churches make preparations for various events like gospel meetings, lectureships, youth rallies, ladies days, and seminars. However, these preparations do not even come close to the most important preparation of all, and that is preparing our souls for eternity.

The Bible tells us that God has placed within each person a soul. “And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed i  
nto his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (KJV, Gen. 2:7). Our soul is the most important possession that we have. Jesus asked a very important question during His earthly ministry, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mat. 16:26). Long before this question was asked, Solomon made this very important statement, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7).

How can we prepare our souls for eternity? How can we make sure that we are prepared for the end of time? In the New Testament, a very important question was asked by a Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). In essence, he was asking “what do I need to do to prepare for eternity?” The apostle Paul wrote, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phi. 2:12).

### **We Need To Make A Reservation**

Have you ever called a hotel and reserved a room? When making a reservation, there are a number of steps to



follow. One must pick up the phone, dial the number, speak with a hotel employee, pick a date, give a credit card number, and receive a confirmation. In John 14, the Bible records an interesting statement that Jesus made to His followers, “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” (John 14:1-3). The English Standard Version translates “mansions” as “rooms.” How can we reserve a room in heaven?

It all begins with hearing the Word of God. The apostle Paul wrote, “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). What will a person hear? One will hear about sin and what it does. In addition, one will hear about the great love of the Father and the Son. The apostle Paul wrote, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). In our Lord’s earthly ministry, Jesus proclaimed, “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). In doing so, He would point out our need for a Savior from sin. Second, one will believe the message that he has heard that Jesus is the Christ, “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). Third, a person will repent, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Finally, a person will be baptized so their sins can be 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). Through

these steps one can reserve a room in heaven.

### **We Need To Confirm Our Reservation**

The word “confirm” is defined as “to acknowledge with definite assurance.” Have you ever called about your hotel room even after you made the reservation just to double check and make sure that your reservation was secure? In his first inspired epistle, the apostle Peter wrote, “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). Knowing that we have an inheritance should motivate us to be faithful. Peter then writes, “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). The word “kept” is a military term that means “to mount guard.” Our Father is guarding our inheritance in heaven. In his second inspired epistle, the apostle Peter wrote, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pet. 1:10). To what things was Peter referring when he wrote the statement, “to make our calling and election sure” and to make sure we are prepared for eternity (2 Pet. 1:10)? “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). Let’s consider each step and make sure our reservation is confirmed by having a proper understanding of what is needed to make our calling and election sure.

#### ***Virtue***

Virtue is not a word that we use every day; however, it is a word that is extremely important and one that needs to be defined. Virtue is a military term that means “lionhearted courage and bravery” (Woods 150). When a soldier goes into

battle he must have the utmost courage to fight against the enemy. Spiritually, we are soldiers in the Lord's army, and we have to have great courage to fight against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). Robert Taylor describes virtue this way, "moral courage and soul vigor. The manliness and the determination to do what is right" (71). Sometimes a young man may be told to "man up." This terminology is used to get the young man to display courage. Every Christian needs to have the moral courage to do what is right when everyone is looking and when no one is looking. When daily battles occur, or personal struggles happen, we need to have the determination to do what is right regardless of the social consequences.

It is one thing to define virtue, it is something completely different to see it in action. Throughout the Scriptures there are numerous examples of those who showed virtue. Brother Ronnie Whittemore shares the following examples. **Abel** chose what was right regardless of whether his brother did so or not. "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). **Noah**—consider all the distractions that Noah encountered as he was preparing the ark. The discouragement he faced from a world that was fully given over to evil. Yet, he still had the determination to do what was right.

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man  
*was* great in the earth, and *that* every  
imagination of the thoughts of his heart  
*was* only evil continually. And it repented  
the LORD that he had made man on the  
earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And  
the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I

have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. (Gen. 6:6-8)

**Joseph** (one of the greatest examples of virtue in the Word of God according to this writer) had become the most important man in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:4). On one occasion, Potiphar's wife decided to try to take advantage of him. She unsuccessfully tries to seduce him.

And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; *There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (Gen. 39:6-9)

Even if no one else would have known, Joseph, Potiphar's wife, and ultimately God would have known. Joseph had the determination not to destroy his relationship with God. Did you know that this was not a one-time occurrence? The Scriptures tell us that she persisted with her seduction. "And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, *or* to be with her" (Gen. 39:10). And each time, Joseph displayed virtue (Whitmore

118).

### **Knowledge**

When Peter writes about knowledge, he is not referring to just any kind of knowledge. He is referring to knowledge of the greatest kind. Theodore Roosevelt said, “A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.” This writer heard once that the average American has four copies of God’s Word. Unfortunately, some never take the time to increase their knowledge of it. Why should we read it? **God wants it read.** The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them” (Isa. 34:16). Moses wrote,

When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that *is* within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law. (Deu. 31:11-12)

During Josiah’s day, God’s law was found and read, resulting in some great transformations (2 Kin. 22). Jesus would ask the question, “Have you not read?” numerous times throughout His ministry. **Jesus read it.** We should want to follow His example. “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). **Paul expected it to be read.** “How that by

revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (Eph. 3:3-4). **What it can do.** It saves us. It guides us. It provides happiness. It gives comfort. It affords understanding.

### ***Temperance***

What is temperance? The New King James and American Standard Version translate temperance as “self-control.” It is defined as “holding one’s passions and desires in hand” (Vincent). It has the idea of self-government or self-discipline. Consider the inspired words from Solomon, “*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city*” (Pro. 16:32). Perhaps one of the most difficult battles that anyone fights is the one with self. Furthermore, Solomon writes, “He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city *that is broken down, and without walls*” (Pro. 25:28). When there is no self-control, it is like a city without walls. It becomes useless.

In what areas can we demonstrate temperance? (1) With our eyes. David said this, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; *it shall not cleave to me*” (Psa. 101:3). (2) With our tongues. Solomon shares some much needed wisdom concerning the tongue, “There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise *is health*” (Pro. 12:18). (3) With our actions. “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26).

Who needs temperance? (1) Those in leadership positions. Those who are secular leaders need it. “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). Those who are spiritual leaders need

temperance: “But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (Tit. 1:8). (2) Those who are striving for a crown. Picture an Olympic athlete who is motivated to get a crown (a gold medal). Consider the words of the apostle Paul concerning the Christian life, “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Cor. 9:25). Are you determined to be prepared for eternity?

### **Patience**

Patience is an emotion we feel when we are stuck in traffic, or waiting in line at Walmart. It can also be an emotion we experience when we are struggling with a personal goal like weight loss or debt removal. Patience is defined as “bearing all trials and difficulties with an even mind, enduring in all, and persevering through all” (Clarke).

When is patience needed? (1) When we are dealing with negative situations. In James 5:11, we are reminded to “remember the patience of Job.” If there is anyone in the Scriptures who dealt with a negative situation, it is Job. His patience is exemplary. In addition to Job, our Lord demonstrated great patience as he dealt with negativity during His earthly ministry. (2) In coping with difficult people. Did you know that there are over forty-one million results for “how to cope with difficult people” on Google? There are a number of self-help lists, coping mechanisms, and support groups. What did Jesus do about difficult people? He prayed for them (Luke 23:34). (3) In trying to remain faithful to God. It takes patience to live the Christian life. Christianity is not a sprint; it is more like a marathon. The Hebrews writer 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).

### **Godliness**

Wendell Winkler describes godliness as “God-like-ness” (15). It is taken from the Greek word *eusebia* which means, “to be like God” (D. Winkler 35). The goal of every single person should be to be like God. Ten of the fifteen times it is found in the letters written to Timothy and Titus. The apostle Peter wrote, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). In essence, God’s Word gives us everything we need to be like Him. The epitome of godliness is found in the life of Jesus. Jesus said, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9).

Where is godliness needed? (1) In our homes. This writer is so thankful that he was raised in a godly home. Growing up we never had to worry about many of the ungodly things that are prominent in society. Cussing, lying, drinking, and drugs were prohibited in our home. (2) In our workplace. Do people want to come to work because of you? (3) In our friendships. Do you make your friendships better? Wendell Winkler suggests that when thinking about godliness, we should consider the great hymn, “O To Be Like Thee” (15).

### **Brotherly Kindness**

Brotherly kindness is translated from the Greek word *philadelphia*. Strong defines it as “brotherly love, love of the brethren.” Dan Winkler has defined it as “a very tender affectionate attachment toward someone else” (36).

What does brotherly kindness do? (1) It gives attention. “*Be* kindly affectioned one to another with



brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). It gives attention because it places the honor on someone else. (2) It abides. “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1). It does not stop. (3) It abounds. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (1 The. 4:9-10).

### **Charity**

Charity is translated from the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* means to “seek the best interest of another.” This is the highest form of love. According to the apostle Paul it is the crowning virtue (Winkler 36). To the Corinthians he wrote, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity” (1 Cor. 13:13). To the Colossians he wrote, “And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Col. 3:14).

Why is charity so important? (1) It reflects Christ. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 2:5). Perhaps the apostle Paul had in mind the love Jesus had as He served His apostles (John 13). (2) It is evidence of Christianity. “By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

To whom can we show charity? Brother Dan Winkler suggests several areas: our family (Eph. 5:25); our brethren (Heb. 13:1); those who are lost (John 3:16); to God (Mat. 22:37); to everyone (Mat. 22:39) (37).

In conclusion, the apostle Peter tells us that these things are to abound in us (2 Pet. 1:8). He then adds to this statement with these words, “they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and

cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pet. 1:8-10). More than anything, I want to go to heaven and I hope that you do as well. The apostle Peter tells us that we can make sure that our reservation is confirmed by adding these things to our faith. Are you making your preparations?

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## Where Do We Go When We Die?

*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 (married to Casey Cella), and Brandon. Don is a veteran of the United States 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 in 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. Don has worked with the Gospel Broadcasting Network since its inception and has served as the executive director since 2010. In addition to his work with GBN, Don preaches for the Southaven church of Christ and serves on the board of directors for World Video Bible School. He is the host of the video series *The Truth About* and the author of the book *The Truth About Moral Issues*.

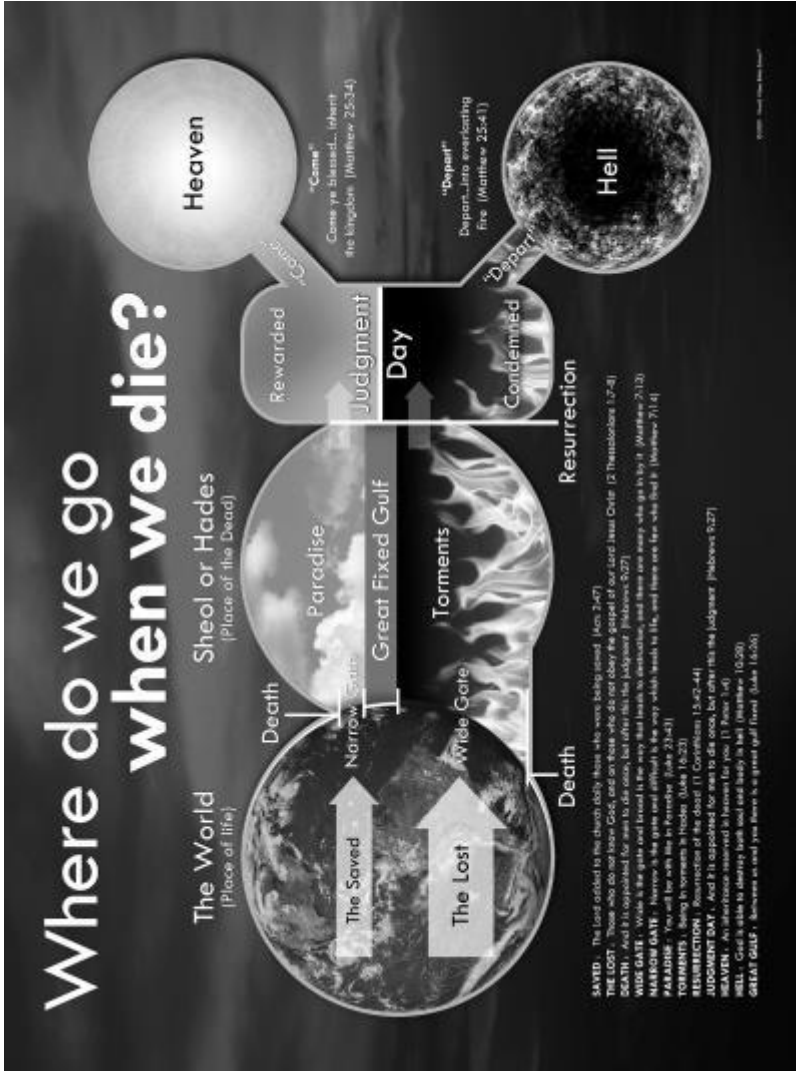
They had been high school sweethearts, and for the last fifty-two years, husband and wife. As he sat by her bed, holding her hand, his mind reviewed their life together. His eyes swelled up with tears as he remembered the highs and lows of their marriage: the births of their children, the joy of grandchildren, and the pain of burying their own parents. Through it all, they had been together. As his sweet Sarah was approaching the end of a two-year battle with cancer, their children gathered around the hospital bed. He clutched her hand tightly. She breathed her last breath, and her body settled peacefully into the sheets and perfectly still.

This scenario or ones like it happen every day. We see those closest to us pass away, and we wonder where they went. What did they experience at that moment when they breathed their last breath? Where do we go when we die? The world has offered a variety of answers to this question. Some have suggested the concept of reincarnation—the idea that when you die your soul transmigrates to another body and lives another life. If you lived a good life, you may come back as an attractive human being. If you lived a bad life, then you may come back as an animal (Krishna.org). Others hold to the idea of ghosts, or the concept that one’s spirit remains on the earth after the death of his body and “haunts” a particular area, such as a house where he once lived or the place he died. The Roman Catholic church has put forth the idea of purgatory which suggests that when one dies, he may go to a place of temporary punishment until such time as he has paid his debt. He will then be released to an eternity of peace (New Advent). And, of course, the belief of the atheist is that at the moment of death, a person ceases to be. He has no existence beyond this life.

Christians, however, do not have to engage in guessing games about eternity. We can know the answer to the questions, “Where did we come from?” and also “Where are we going?” In this lesson, we will trace the existence of the human soul from the moment of its beginning, to death, and on into eternity. Please see the accompanying chart, “Where Do We Go When We Die?” (see fig. 1, p. 15) as it will greatly assist as we progress from point to point.

### **The Beginning Of The Soul**

The human soul has its beginning in heaven. Ecclesiastes 12:7 is often cited at funerals and to discuss death, but it teaches something very important about the beginning of life as well.



(Fig. 1)

Solomon wrote, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return **unto God who gave it**” (NKJV, Ecc. 12:7) [emphasis added]. Hebrews 12:9 calls God, “the Father of spirits.” At the moment of conception God places a soul into that newly created human life. The child’s mother and father give him his physical characteristics, but they don’t give him his soul. That comes from heaven. God said, “Let us [the Godhead] make man in our image, after our likeness.” Primarily this has reference to the soul of man. He is a being who will live eternally because he has a soul. This makes man different and superior to the animals.

### **This World**

From the time that God places a soul into that newly created human being, it will continue to dwell in that physical body until that person dies. “For we know that if our earthly house *this* tent [the physical body] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). From the time of birth and for the next seventy or eighty years, a man’s soul dwells in a temporary body. The temporal nature of the fleshly body is why 2 Corinthians 5 refers to it as a tent. One doesn’t live in a tent except for brief periods. James says that our life is a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away (Jam. 4:14).

During those years of fleshly existence, I worship God with my spirit. John 4:24 says, “God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” I engage the physical body, but my spirit is the seat of worship. The spirit is the heart of man. In addition to worship, I also love God with my spirit/soul. Luke 10:27 states, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with **all your soul** [emphasis added], with all your strength, and with all your mind...*”

All the while, this physical body is wearing out. Solomon describes this process in Ecclesiastes 12:

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" [It is common that life gets physically difficult as the body ages]. While the sun and the light, The moon and the stars, Are not darkened [Your eye sight starts to fail], And the clouds do not return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house tremble [Hands begin to tremble], And the strong men bow down [Legs get weak and you fall down]; When the grinders cease because they are few [Lose your teeth], And those that look through the windows grow dim; When the doors are shut in the streets, And the sound of grinding is low; When one rises up at the sound of a bird [Don't sleep well], And all the daughters of music are brought low [Lose your hearing]; Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms [Hair turns gray], The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets. *Remember your Creator* before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well [You die]. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was

[The corruptible body dies and decays and returns to the ground/elements], And the spirit will return to God who gave it. (Ecc. 12:1-7)

### Death

What happens to me when I die? For seventy or eighty years my soul has been dwelling in this physical body, but what happens when this physical body dies? Psalm 90:10 tells us, “The days of our lives *are* seventy years; And if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, Yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and **we fly away**” [emphasis added]. Genesis 35:18 describes the death of Rachel, “And it came to pass, as her soul was departing...” James tells us that “the body without the spirit is dead” (Jam. 2:26). So, when I die, my soul leaves this old corruptible body. It departs and flies away, but the question is, where does it go?

On the day of resurrection my soul will get a new body, but what about in the meantime? What if I die tomorrow, but the day of resurrection does not come for another ten thousand years? What will be the status of my soul during that ten thousand year period? The answer is revealed by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians. He writes, “For we know that if our earthly house, **this tent**, is destroyed, we have **a building** from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be **unclothed**, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:1,4) [emphasis added]. Notice some key phrases in this text. He speaks of being in this body as a tent. He refers to the resurrected body as a building eternal in the heavens, but then he speaks of being “unclothed.” When is this going to occur? This is the period between when I die and my soul leaves the tent (my physical body) and the day of



resurrection when I get my new resurrected body. During this time my soul will be “unclothed” (Cotham 265). At the moment of death, the soul leaves the physical body and enters into the hadean realm.

### **The Hadean Realm**

On the accompanying chart, the middle section is representative of the hadean realm. This is hades. People are often confused at the mention of hades because they think of it as referring to hell, or the place of punishment. This is incorrect. Hades is the dwelling place of the dead. It might be described as a holding area for disembodied spirits. The good who die go to hades. The bad who die go to hades. Undoubtedly, a large reason for the confusion over the definition of hades is because the King James Version of the Bible has incorrectly translated the Greek word for hades as hell. In the Greek text, the words for *hades* and *hell* are two different words. Hades is the dwelling place of the dead. Gehenna is hell. The King James Version, however, translates both words as hell. This mistranslation has caused a misunderstanding of several passages of scripture. For instance, in Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church and stated that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. The word translated as *hell* in this verse is not really *hell* (gehenna). Rather, it is hades. The proper meaning is that death (hades, the dwelling place of the dead) would not prevent the establishment of His kingdom. Jesus stated this to His apostles knowing that he would soon be put to death. This was assurance to them that His death would not stop the plan for establishing the kingdom of God. As a side note, the Old Testament or Hebrew word for hades is *sheol*. Sheol and hades refer to the same place (Cotham 330).

Once you understand that all people go to hades when they die, it will help to clear up some things. For example,

Acts 2:31 in the King James Version refers to Christ after His death as being in hell. The Greek word in this verse is the word for hades. Jesus did not go to hell when he died. He did, however, go to hades, specifically paradise. In Luke 23:43, as Christ was about to die, He told the thief hanging next to Him on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Acts 2:31 and Luke 23:43 fit perfectly together when you understand that paradise is a compartment of hades.

In hades, there is a place where the righteous go to await judgment, and there is a place where the wicked go to await judgment. The best description in the Bible of hades is found in Luke 16. It describes both compartments:

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is

comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” (Luke 16:19-26)

### ***Paradise***

First, let’s consider the place where Lazarus was taken. The beggar died and opened his eyes to see angels carrying him to Abraham’s bosom. This is the compartment of hades where the righteous go to await judgment. It’s the place known as paradise. This is the same place that Christ promised the thief on the cross that he would go. Luke 16:25 tells us that in this place the righteous are comforted. “This Persian term originally described a park or pleasure garden” (Manser). It has often been stated that mankind’s greatest fear is that of death. Perhaps this is why God has angels awaiting the righteous at that very moment.

### ***Torment***

The rich man went to the opposite section of hades. He entered a place of torment. This section of hades is called *tartarus* in the Greek. Peter used this word in 2 Peter 2:4 when he said, “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to [tartarus] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.” The rich man died and was buried. He did not have angels to accompany him to his destination. Rather he opened his eyes in hades, more specifically in torments. The King James says “in hell he lifted up his eyes,” but again, this is an incorrect translation. The word is hades, not hell.

The misery of this place must be observed. Notice briefly that the rich man is burning in fire. He is crying out and begging for mercy. He believes that a mere drop of water would bring him at least a moment’s relief. Soberly consider

that every person (from the beginning of time until now) who has died lost in the eyes of God is in this place. Many of them have been there for thousands of years.

### ***Consciousness In Hades***

Another important observation about the hadean realm is that there is consciousness there. There is a doctrine taught by some referred to as *soul sleeping*. It suggests that when a person dies, he enters a state of unconsciousness and ceases to be aware. Luke 16, as well as many other passages, however, teaches us that after death men are **very much** aware. The rich man is crying in pain. Lazarus is comforted. Psalm 116:15 says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Surely this text is not teaching us that it is precious to God when His children slip into a state of unconsciousness.

I preached on hades on one occasion, and when the sermon was over, a man approached me in the foyer. He said, “That was a great lesson, but I have a verse you need to read, because you’re wrong about there being consciousness in the hadean realm.” He then handed me a piece of paper, and he walked off. I unfolded the piece of paper, which contained the scripture reference Ecclesiastes 9:5 and the words, “The dead know not anything.” His assertion was that this passage teaches that when a man dies, he ceases to be aware of anything. The truth, however, is that he was misinterpreting this verse because he was pulling it out of context. Verse 6 of the same chapter uses the phrase, “under the sun.” The phrase is repeated in verses 3, 9, and 13. The context of Ecclesiastes 9 is pertaining to things going on in this world (under the sun). When a person dies and goes to paradise or torment he is no longer under the sun and is therefore no longer aware of the things going on back on the earth. In 2 Chronicles 34, King Josiah was told by God that He was going to bring

punishment upon Jerusalem for their sins, but that he would die before it happened. The Lord said, "Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes **shall not see** [emphasis added] all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants" (2 Chr. 34:28). Clearly the message of this verse is that since Josiah will have passed from this life into the realm of hades, he would not see the things that would take place back on the earth. In that same vein, Ecclesiastes 9 teaches that the dead "know not anything" with regard to the things taking place in this present world after they have left it.

### ***Great Gulf Fixed***

Luke 16:26 states that between paradise and torment there is a great gulf, a divide, a chasm fixed, so that no one can pass from one location to the other. This is represented on the accompanying chart (fig. 1) by a green line. When a person dies and his soul enters paradise, he is there to stay until the day of judgment. Likewise, when a person dies and his soul enters torment, he is there to stay until the day of judgment. This being the case, every person who has ever died unfaithful in the eyes of God is still there. Many of them have been there for thousands of years. Some have been there only minutes; some seconds. They cry, "I am tormented in this flame," but it never ends.

### **The Resurrection**

Resurrection day is commonly referred to as the day of judgment. The Bible calls it, "the day of the Lord." Peter says "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Pet. 3:10). When this day arrives, what is going to happen to the souls in hades (paradise or torment)? On that day, the hadean world will give up the souls it contains, and the earth will give up its bodies. In John 5:28-29 Jesus said, "for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves [This Greek

word means “grave” or “tomb” (Nida)] will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” At that time the souls will be reunited with their bodies, **but** the bodies will be different. They will not be the fleshly bodies from before (the tent, 1 Cor. 5:1), but rather the new resurrected bodies.

The resurrected body will be vastly different from the physical body of the present age, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 15:50). Sometimes people have expressed concern about having their bodies cremated for fear that it will pose a problem at the resurrection. Assuredly it will not! The resurrected body will not be made up of the same elements that we have on this earth. The resurrected body will not be flesh and blood. 1 Corinthians 15:44 discusses the differences in the present physical body and the resurrected body:

*The body* [the physical body] is sown in corruption, it [the resurrected body] is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

Let’s consider some key distinctions described between the present body and body to come. First, the resurrected body will be **incorruptible**. Our current bodies are subject to death. They get old and wear out. The new body won’t wear out and will never die. The resurrected body will be a **glorious** body. Our present bodies have many things associated with them that are lowly and vile. The new body will be a thing of

beauty, joy, and purity. The resurrected body “will be raised in **power**.” Our present bodies get tired. They are inherently weak. The resurrected body will have unflinching vigor, capable of tireless activity. The resurrected body will be a **spiritual** one. Our present bodies are “natural.” The day of judgment will be the resurrection day. It will be the day that our souls will get new incorruptible, spiritual bodies (Cotham 237-238).

But what about those who are still living when the judgment day comes? In 1 Corinthians 15:52 Paul says, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the dead [those in hades] shall be raised incorruptible, and we [those still living] shall be changed.” The living also will be changed into incorruptible bodies like those who were dead.

### **The Judgment**

After both the good and the bad receive their resurrected bodies, we will all stand before the throne of Christ and be judged. Matthew 25:32 says, “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats.” Notice that all of humanity will be present. On that day, the rich man and Lazarus will stand before the Lord to receive their eternal judgment. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will stand before God. Ahab, Jezebel, and Judas will stand before God. “So then **everyone of us** [emphasis added] shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10) (Winkler).

Sometimes people ask, “What is the point of the judgment if people have been in paradise or torment? It seems like they’ve already been judged.” The judgment day is not, however, a day in which God has to weigh the evidence. It is not a day of trial to determine who is lost and who is saved.

God knows that the moment you die. We might more accurately refer to it as “The Pronouncement of Judgment Day.” It’s the day that God will state the reasons **why** a man is lost or saved and then pronounce his eternal sentence or reward. There will not be a man in heaven who does not know the reasons for why he is there. Likewise, there will not be a man in hell who doesn’t know why he is there (Highers).

### **Eternity**

In Matthew 25:46, the Lord said, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” Mankind has been created in the image of God and thus given an eternal soul which will never cease to exist. There are two alternatives as to where we will spend eternity (see fig. 1). One is a place of eternal bliss. It’s the destination of the faithful—heaven. “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34). Jesus calls this place “life eternal.”

The other eternal destination is a place of torment—hell. It’s described in Revelation 21:8 as, “the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.” It’s the place the Lord has in mind when he says of sinners, “And these shall go away into **everlasting punishment**” [emphasis added]. How long is the punishment in hell going to last? The Lord said it will last eternally. It will be everlasting. Revelation 14:11 says, “And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night.” Assuredly, there is nothing more terrifying than this. The man who dies and ultimately goes to hell has tomorrow, and the next day, and the next year, and the next million years to suffer and burn and continue to exist. In reality, there will be no years, as time will be no more. He will suffer in fire and torment forever without end.



### Conclusion

The soul of man enters the physical body at the point of conception. At death, it leaves the body and enters hades where it remains as a spirit until the day of resurrection. On that day it reunites with the new incorruptible body, and all of humanity will be gathered before Christ for the judgment. Then, each of us with our new incorruptible body will enter eternal bliss in heaven or eternal torment in hell.

Where we go when we die is determined by where we are spiritually at the moment of death. Every person reading this material is presently traveling a road. It is either the narrow road that leads to life, or the broad way that leads to destruction (Mat. 7:13-14). If you died before this day is over, would you open your eyes to see angels escorting you to paradise, or would you open your eyes in torment realizing that you waited too late?

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# Play By Play Of The Final Day: The Events Of The Judgment Day

*B. J. Clarke*



Bradley Joseph (B. J.) Clarke was born in Canton, Illinois, the son of Ted and Sherrie Clarke. His father is also a Gospel preacher and educator of preachers. B. J. married the former Tamela (Tish) Hall. He earned B.S. and M.A. degrees in New Testament Text from Freed-Hardeman University. He is also an honorary alumnus of the Memphis School of Preaching.

B. J. delivered his first sermon at age nine. He began full-time preaching in 1983 and has preached in numerous youth rallies, gospel meetings, and lectureships. He has done local work in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. For over sixteen years he served as a preacher for the Southaven congregation in Southaven, Mississippi. During that time, he edited the *POWER* magazine, directed the annual *POWER* lectureship, and edited the annual lectureship book. He was a member of the adjunct faculty of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions from 1989-1990. Currently, he serves as the director of the Memphis School of Preaching. He is also the director of FOUNDATIONS.

## Introduction

From the time I was a child until this moment in time, I have been captivated by televised sports—baseball, football, basketball, hockey, tennis, golf, etc.—you name it, I love them all. I have been known even to watch televised bowling, ping-pong, and putt-putt championships on Saturday morning television. Upon receiving this assignment with the above title, I could not help but wonder how many sports “plays” I have watched on television in my fifty-six years of living. I have no idea what that number would be, but I am sure the number is staggering, especially if you add in replays and the advent of ESPN and other 24/7 sports networks.

However, of the countless sports plays I have seen and play by play commentary I have heard, the number of plays that made a lasting impression on me is actually quite small. The ones that do stand out have some things in common: they involved dramatic or unexpected events, perhaps a play or outcome rarely (or never before) seen. One of the reasons televised sports are so popular is because of the chance to view those unexpected plays or outcomes that have never before been seen. I can remember watching certain athletes accomplish feats no one else had ever accomplished. I remember a few trick plays that changed the momentum of a particular game, and they either led a team to victory or backfired and sealed that team's defeat. I can remember the ball bouncing or ricocheting in some unexpected way and sometimes determining the very outcome of the game. Some of the plays I most remember are the ones involving either the "thrill of victory" or "agony of defeat." This is especially so when it comes to those plays that cost my favorite team the game or the championship versus those plays that sealed the victory or the championship!

Of one thing I am very certain: even I have watched a million televised sports plays in my lifetime, and I have never seen or heard any play in any sport that could match the importance of the "play by play" description of the events that will transpire on the last day of earthly history, the judgment day. As much as I love watching sports, and especially those games in my lifetime when my team won the championship, even my most cherished memories of viewing certain sporting events pale in comparison to the significance of the events that will take place on the day of judgment.

What are these events, and how can I know about them? For that matter, how can any of us even know that there will be a judgment day? The only way we could know

that there will be a last day on earth is if the Maker of days has revealed this to His creation. How can any of us know what happened at the beginning of days? There were no television cameras there to capture a video record of how and when the world began. We cannot watch an instant replay of what occurred, so how can we know for sure what happened? The only way we could know is if someone who was there made a record of it and revealed it to us. There is Someone who did that very thing. God, who was there, chose to reveal a “play by play” of what transpired on the various days of creation, by inspiring holy men of God to speak as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21; Gen. 1-2; Psa. 33:6-9). The same God who was there at the beginning of days also knows what will transpire at the end of days, particularly the last day, the judgment day, and He has revealed it all in His “Divine Playbook,” the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

### **A Scripted Play**

Something scripted is something that is planned ahead of time. When Bill Walsh was the head coach of the San Francisco 49ers, he liked to script the first 25 offensive plays of the game. Of course, Coach Walsh did not reveal these plays to his team’s opponent, and there were times when certain game situations and defensive alignments caused him to deviate from the script. However, well before the game was actually played, Coach Walsh entered into the game with an already scripted game plan.

In a similar way, God has scripted that certain events will transpire on the day of judgment. In this case, however, there is no “defensive alignment” that Satan can use to thwart His plans. This is all the more remarkable when you consider that God has opened up His “Divine Playbook” and has announced the exact things He is going to do on the judgment day, and yet there is not one thing Satan can do to stop Him.

Most of the time a team tries to hide its play call from the opposition, hoping to gain an advantage by the element of surprise. However, there are occasions when a football team will have such a dominant running game that the announcer will say, “This team is running at will against the opponent. They are lining up in an obvious running formation and basically saying to their opponent, ‘We are going to run straight at you. Try and stop us!’” In a similar way, God’s will cannot be stopped by satanic opposition on the day of judgment. God has promised that there will be a day of judgment, and there is nothing Satan can do to stop it!

Before exploring the specific events that will transpire on the day of judgment, it is necessary to prove the day itself has been scripted to occur in the first place. The Scriptures provide the script that such a day will indeed occur. In his sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, Paul gave assurance that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (KJV, Acts 17:31). The resurrection of Christ is proof there will be a judgment day, but in order for a judgment day to occur, the Lord must come back again. Does the New Testament give us any assurance that Jesus is coming back again? Indeed, it does! The second coming is mentioned in twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books. Nearly four hundred verses in the New Testament address the vital subject of our Lord’s return, a ratio of about one out of every twenty-five verses. The Scriptures are filled with the promise of His coming.

1. **Jesus promised that He would come again.** When General Douglas MacArthur left the Philippine Islands in defeat, he said, “I shall return.” Our Lord did not leave this earth in defeat, but He did promise to return.

At a time when His disciples needed strength and encouragement, Jesus said, “Let not your hearts 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 to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3). Jesus also promised that He would come in glory with His holy angels to sit upon His throne and judge the world (Mat. 25:31ff). The script has been written already—Jesus is coming back to judge the world (John 5:22; 2 Cor. 5:10).

2. **Angels announced that Jesus would come back again.** The very first message from heaven after the ascension of Christ was an announcement made by angels that He would come again. “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Angels announced His first coming (Luke 2:9-14) and angels announced the promise of His second coming (Acts 1:9-11). According to the script in God’s Divine Playbook, angels will also accompany Jesus at His second coming (Mat. 13:41-42, 49-50; 16:27; Mark 8:38).
3. **The apostles and inspired writers taught that Jesus would return.** Paul affirmed the second coming of Christ when he wrote, “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 The. 4:16). Paul speaks of the second coming in every chapter of 1 and

2 Thessalonians. There can be no question that Paul believed in the second coming.

The epistles of Peter are also filled with predictions of His coming. Peter encouraged the persecuted readers of his first epistle to endure temptations so that they “might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7). He further admonished them to “hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13). To those scoffers who asked, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Peter replied, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come...” (2 Pet. 3:4, 9-10). Peter taught the second coming of Christ as a certainty!

John gives apostolic testimony to the veracity of the second coming in the final book of the Bible: “Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7). Hence, we see that in every single division of the New Testament reference is made to the reality of the second coming of Christ. Jesus is coming back, and there will be a judgment day!

### **A Surprise Play**

One of the potentially most effective plays a team can run against an opponent in football is the surprise gadget play. On play after play, the quarterback (QB) hands the ball to the running back. If he runs effectively, extra defenders might start leaving their assigned man too soon and try to assist in bringing down the running back by collapsing toward the line of scrimmage as soon as the ball is snapped. To counter this, the astute offensive coordinator might call for a surprise play



known as the “flea flicker” in which the QB hands the ball to the running back who starts toward the line of scrimmage. As the defenders leave their assigned men to converge toward the ball carrier, the running back turns back toward the QB and laterals him the ball. The QB looks for the open receiver/receivers who have been abandoned by their defenders and attempts to pass them the ball for a big play—and hopefully a touchdown! If the defense knew this play was about to happen, none of the defenders would leave their men unguarded. The element of surprise is critical to the success of the play.

Much more significant than a football game is the judgment day! Although the final day of judgment is a certain scripted event, the arrival of that day will be a surprise. The Scriptures clearly teach that it is not within the power of man to know when Jesus is coming back. In Matthew 24, Jesus gave His disciples signs by which they could know that the destruction of Jerusalem was drawing near (Mat. 24:1-34). But in speaking of the final day of judgment, Jesus said,

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken into. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” (Mat. 24:36, 42-44)

The comparison between a thief and his coming and Christ and His coming is used quite often in the Sacred Writings.

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Christ said He would come as a thief (Rev. 16:15). Concerning the period of the second coming, Paul told the Thessalonians, “But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 The. 5:1-2). Peter used this same imagery in his second epistle, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...” (2 Pet. 3:10).

In spite of these plain declarations of Scripture, much time and energy has been wasted by men in attempting to determine the time of the Lord’s second coming. The Thessalonian brethren had come to the conclusion that He was going to return in the first century. Paul wrote his epistles to the church at Thessalonica to deal with this error, telling them that certain events had to take place before the Lord would appear for the second time (2 The. 2:1ff). A man by the name of William Miller, who founded Seventh-Day Adventism, said that Jesus would come sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. Sadly, some of his followers clothed themselves with ascension robes and climbed hills and mountains so that they would be among the first to see our Lord split the sky. Of course, He did not return, but that did not stop other men from trying to script the date for His return. Other dates that have been set for the second coming of our Lord are 1914, 1918, 1925, 1945, 1967, 1975, and September 11-13, 1988. The latter date was set by Edgar Whisenant who claimed that the rapture would take place on either September 11, 12, or 13 in 1988. Mr. Whisenant’s prediction was not the first to fail and it will certainly not be the last. The failure of all of these date setters is irrefutable evidence that they are false prophets and not to be trusted as true spokesmen of God (Deu. 18:20-22).

When is Jesus coming again? Is Jesus coming soon? Is

His second coming in the far and distant future? No man in all the world possibly can know the answer to these questions. The New Testament teaches the same thing today as when it was first written. If it did not teach then that Jesus was coming soon, it does not teach it now. And if it did not teach then that the coming of Christ was in the distant future, it does not teach such now. The time period of the arrival of the judgment day is one of the secret things that belongs to God (Deu. 29:29).

### A Supernatural Play by Play

No play on any earthly field, or in any fieldhouse or arena, no matter how outstanding or breathtaking, could begin to compare with the supernatural exhibition of Divine Power which will be manifested on the day of judgment. In what manner shall He come?

1. **He will come visibly.** The apostles saw Jesus leave earth and return to heaven. The angels announced that He would return in like manner. He will come on the clouds with His angels. He left with the clouds to return to His Father, the Ancient of Days, in order that He might be given a glorious kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14; Acts 1:9). When He returns He will come with the clouds (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7). He will also be accompanied by “mighty angels” (2 The. 1:7; Mat. 13:41-50). When Jesus returns, “Every eye shall see him” (Rev. 1:7). This passage alone completely demolishes the false doctrine advanced by Jehovah’s Witnesses in which they assert that Jesus came secretly in 1914. The second coming of our Lord will not be a secret. Both the living and the dead will know that it is taking place.
2. **He will come audibly.** When Jesus returns, He will be heard as well as seen! He will descend from heaven

with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God (1 The. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). It does not matter what one is listening to when Jesus comes. They will hear the trump of God. The roar of ninety-five thousand cheering fans will not be able to silence the deafening blast of our Lord's shout. The thundering sound of a supersonic jet will sound like a pin dropping on the floor when compared to the sounds that will accompany our Lord's return. His voice will even be heard by the dead (John 5:28-29).

3. **He will come powerfully.** The second coming of Jesus will be vastly different than His first coming. When Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, He was a helpless baby. He needed others to provide protection from those who wanted to kill Him. When Jesus comes back, He will come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 The. 1:8-9). Many on that day will seek for someone to provide protection from His power and yet none shall be able to stand. Those who are righteous will likewise stand in awe of His power and will receive blessings from it rather than condemnation. The Scriptures provide "a play by play" of the power He will display on the judgment day.
4. **He is coming to raise the dead and change the living.** When Jesus descends from heaven with a shout, "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and 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).

According to the Divine Script, “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 The. 4:16). But, what of those who are alive at the second coming of Christ? “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:51-53). Why is it that corruption must put on incorruption? It is because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50). Thus, when Jesus comes back He will raise the dead and give them incorruptible bodies. He will then change the bodies of those who are living from corruptible to incorruptible. After the dead in Christ rise to meet the Lord, the living faithful will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air and so shall they ever be with the Lord (1 The. 4:17).

5. **He will judge the world.** At His appearing Jesus will judge both the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1). The Father has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained, Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son...And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:22, 27). No one can escape this judgment. All nations will be there (Mat. 25:32). All mankind will be there. Both the small and great will stand before God, and the books of Holy Scripture will be opened and compared to our deeds to determine whether our

names are in the book of life (Rev. 20:12). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12; Ecc. 12:14). At this judgment scene the righteous will be rewarded with life eternal (Mat. 25:34, 46; Rom. 2:6-7), while the wicked will receive everlasting punishment (Mat. 25:41, 46; Rom. 2:8-9; 2 The. 1:7-9).

6. **He will destroy the world.** When the day of the Lord comes, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). When Jesus comes back there will be no need for this old earth anymore. The only two existing places after judgment will be heaven and hell. Some denominations teach that at the end of time, man will live forever in paradise on earth. This is impossible, for there will be no earth upon which to live. It will be destroyed. Knowledge of this fact should motivate us to be holy in our manner of living so that we can enjoy a heavenly home (2 Pet. 3:11-14).

### **The Play by Play You Will Never See Or Hear On Judgment Day**

The day of judgment has been scripted by the authority of Almighty God, and only those “plays” in His Divine Playbook will be called on that Day. However, some are determined to call their own plays and rewrite the script of what will happen on the judgment day. Despite the unauthorized attempts of some to revise God’s agenda for the judgment day, there are some things you will never see or hear Jesus do on that final day.

1. **Jesus is not coming back to live on the earth and**

- minister to its residents in the form of teaching and healing.** Jesus came the first time to do these things. He confirmed His Sonship during His first coming (John 20:30-31). He does not need to do so again.
2. **He is not coming back to give His life as a sacrifice for sins.** His first coming accomplished salvation for man. His first coming had a redemptive purpose (Mat. 9:13; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15). His second coming has a judicial purpose. When Christ comes again He will be wearing his judicial robes, for the redemptive robe has been laid aside never to be worn again (Heb. 9:28).
  3. **He is not coming to give man a second chance to obey the Gospel.** It is appointed unto men once to die and after this comes the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Our chance to obey the Gospel is now. The very reason the Lord lingers in His coming is because He is long-suffering and wants to give men a chance to obey the Gospel before He comes (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul tells us that the Lord is coming back to take vengeance on those who have not obeyed the Gospel, not to give them a second chance (2 The. 1:7-9). If we are outside of Christ when He comes, we will remain so for all eternity!
  4. **He is not coming to establish an earthly kingdom.** His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Paul looked forward to a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one (2 Tim. 4:18). The faithful will not receive Jesus unto themselves on earth. Rather, Jesus will receive the faithful unto Himself in heaven (John 14:3). Besides, the kingdom has already been established. It was established on the day of Pentecost during the lifetime of those to whom Jesus spoke in Mark 9:1

(Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 22ff). Jesus is already King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9).

### **You Make The Call—How Will The Play End For You?**

Although God is the only one with the authority to write the script for the judgment day, He has provided you and me with the opportunity to determine how the script will read for us at the end. If we follow His inspired Scriptures which will judge us in the last day (John 12:48), we will hear the sweet words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat. 25:21). If we try to write our own life script, then essentially we have scripted the words He will speak to us on the judgment day: “Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41).

Now is the time for us to write a happy ending to our day of judgment experience. Since we do not know when our Lord will return we must be ready at all times. God wants the lack of information concerning the time of Christ’s second coming to motivate us to watch and be ready for whenever He might come. The greatest concern of this life is to be ready for the next life. Whether morning, noon, or night we must be ready (Mark 13:34-37). There will be no time to make preparation after the trump has sounded. Jesus told the story of ten virgins and their preparations for the coming of the bridegroom. Five were wise and made proper preparations. Five were foolish and waited until it was too late. After the door was shut they begged the Lord to open for them, but it was too late (Mat. 25:1-13). Likewise, some will be unprepared for the judgment day. They too will beg for entrance into the marriage supper of the Lamb, and they too will be denied the privilege of entrance.

Many scoffed at Noah’s promise of a coming flood to separate the righteous from the wicked. There are modern-day



scoffers who go about “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage” giving little if any thought to the promised second coming of Christ (Mat. 24:38-39). Sadly, many hear the preachers of righteousness today warn of preparing for the day of judgment and still do nothing about it. On August 17, 1969, Hurricane Camille slammed into the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, killing hundreds of people. The most disturbing part of this tragedy was that the majority of these people had plenty of time to escape, but they refused to believe the warnings! Policemen warned twenty-two young people to evacuate the house they were partying in on three separate occasions. These young people laughed because they were having a good time and did not believe the warning. When they finally realized that death was closing in on them it was too late. Likewise, many tune out the preachers’ warnings because they do not want to be disturbed. Someone has well said, “You can smash the barometer that tells you the storm is coming, but that won’t stop the storm from coming.” We must prepare for the coming storm (Mat. 7:21-27).

### **Conclusion**

When Jesus comes back again there will only be two classes of people: the lost and the saved, the sheep and the goats (Mat. 25:32-33); the prepared and the unprepared (Mat. 25:1-13); the unashamed and the ashamed (1 John 2:28). Those who are in Christ and abide in Christ shall be confident and unashamed (2 Tim. 2:10; 1 John 2:28). Penitent believers are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27). Accountable individuals in the New Testament age who have not been baptized into Christ are not in Christ, and thus they have no hope of being with Christ in eternity.

Prior to judgment day, the question of life is, “What are we going to do with Jesus?” But the question on the day of judgment will be, “What will Jesus do with us?” If we

want Him to receive us then, we must accept Him now by obeying His will.

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## Not Everyone Who Says Lord, Lord

*Will Hanstein*



Will Hanstein was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He is married to the former Jeni Smith and they have two children: Samuel and Baylee. Will holds B.A. and M.A. degrees from Freed-Hardeman University and has preached for churches in Colorado, Tennessee, and Texas. He has been the director of the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies, formerly the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, since June 2015.

Nothing is so sad as a time when a person believes he will receive a tremendous blessing only to discover he will receive something less, nothing at all, or even a punishment or penalty. As a young boy, I opened our mailbox to find a letter from Ed McMahon which said I had won ten million dollars. Excitedly, I brought it to my parents only to be informed of the rules of the contest and that I won nothing. Parents across the country have posted videos online of cruel pranks they play on their children. Several show parents telling their small children that they are going to Disneyland, only to take them to the dentist instead. Their disappointed faces are truly heartbreaking. Stories abound of hopeful brides and grooms left dejected at the altar. Many more examples could be listed of hopeful people being surprised by unexpected, unhappy outcomes.

There is no greater potential for tragedy than someone who is excited about the prospect of heaven, confident in the outcome of judgment day, believing they are right with Jesus, only to discover on judgment day they are mistaken. Jesus comments on this sad predicament in Matthew 7:21-23. “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!’” (NKJV).

Jesus makes three points about entrance into heaven. First, the criteria for entrance is obedience. Second, many will be ignorant of their true standing before God. Third, the reality of their situation is condemnation.

### **The Criteria Is Obedience**

There are numerous, differing beliefs about God’s requirements for entrance into heaven. The most prevalent and common seems to be a belief that simply acknowledging Christ as Lord is sufficient. This is commonly called a faith-only view. Jesus clears up any misconception regarding the efficacy of a faith-only belief by saying, “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” (Mat. 7:21). The word “Lord” can refer to a variety of relationships. “In common usage ‘lord’ reflected the slave system, and implied the absolute power exercised by the master over the purchased slave” (White 1347). However, here it obviously refers to Jesus (Bauer 578). The fact that “Lord” is used twice in succession indicates very clearly that the people to whom Jesus is referring regard Him as their lord and master. They have belief, or faith, but that alone is all they have.

Yet, that is not the only criteria for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, or faith, is surely important and necessary, but Jesus’ statement that “not everyone” who says this will enter clearly shows faith-only is not enough. It must be faith coupled with **obedience**. Those who enter are those who **do** the will of

God. Paul says something very similar when discussing the return of Christ by saying, “and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed 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). Notice that vengeance will come, not only on those who do not know God, but also those who know him but refuse to obey Him.

So many “Christians” in our world believe that simple acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, faith only, is sufficient and all that is necessary for entrance into heaven. Obedience is great but optional, in their view. Yet the Bible tells us differently. Jesus says, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). John writes, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). Another way to say this is “Now by this we know that we have true faith, if we keep His commandments.” Employees will not keep their jobs if all they do is recognize their employer as the boss, while refusing to obey his direction. Soldiers are disciplined if they simply salute and say “yes sir,” but fail to carry out the order. Similarly, how can anyone expect to be pleasing to Jesus when they swear fealty to Him by saying, “Lord, Lord,” but do not obey Him? “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). The criteria for entrance into heaven is obedience, not faith alone.

### **The Problem Is Ignorance**

The reaction of many people will be stunned disbelief. “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?’” (Mat. 7:22). These

unfortunate persons apparently will have lived their lives believing they were obedient to Jesus. While they were saying “Lord, Lord” both on earth and now at judgment, they did not obey his commandments.

The identity of these people can be ascertained from Matthew 7:15-20, where Jesus warns of the harmful influence of false prophets. Jesus says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit” (Mat. 7:15-17). The false teachers themselves would prey on those they claimed to be helping, although they also believed they were obeying God in the process (cf. Mat. 7:22). Additionally, those they preyed upon would also be corrupted, as bad trees produce bad fruit. Thus, the identities of the condemned in Matthew 7:22 are both false prophets and those that followed them, both groups of whom believed they were obeying God in the process, as they knew, confessed the Lord, and performed works.

However, there is a startling description of these people seen in the words of Jesus. Jesus ascribes miraculous works to them. Three different types of miraculous works are described; prophecy, exorcism, and miraculous workings, literally “powerful works.” It may be that they simply thought they were performing these miracles, but were in actuality just performing natural works and ascribing the miraculous to them. However, it is also possible that Jesus is affirming that these people performed miracles in His name.

Several points are worth being considered. First, these people plainly believed they were performing miracles **by the authority of Jesus Himself**. The question of the condemned begins with the Greek word *ou*, meaning “not.” However, the

word in this position in the sentence indicates that the condemned expected an affirmative response from Jesus (Robertson). Clearly, these men and women believed they had performed miracles and believed they had done so in obedience to Jesus.

Second, Jesus says they performed miracles. Arndt says prophesy means, “to proclaim an inspired revelation, prophesy” (890). Arndt also says that the word “demons” refers to “a hostile transcendent being with status between humans and deities, spirit, power, hostile divinity, evil spirit” (210). Arndt says again concerning the word “wonders” that it refers to, “a deed that exhibits ability to function powerfully, deed of power, miracle, wonder” (264). If we are to take Jesus’ words for their clear meaning, Jesus Himself ascribes miraculous workings to these people, as well.

Third, relegating them to the category of “lying wonders,” as some scholars are want to do, fails to take into account certain aspects of lying wonders. It is true that Jesus says in Matthew 24:24, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” In discussing the man of lawlessness, 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.” Notice, however, that the words used indicate miraculous events. While the miraculous events would be used by the false prophets to deceive people, they were still miraculous.

There is only one conclusion that can be drawn about those condemned in Matthew 7:21-23. They must be Christian people, both those who were engaged in false teaching, as well as those who were deceived by it. Jesus said they would be known, or identified as false teachers, “by their fruits” (Mat. 7:16). A non-Christian is easily identifiable as

someone who has not been immersed, does not believe in Jesus, etc. However, these false teachers could be identified only by the type of Christian (fruit) they produced.

They also performed miracles, powers which were available only to Christians. It is true miraculous works were designed by God as powers that attested to the reliability of the worker and the truthfulness of his message. John writes, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). An example of this is given in Acts 8:6, which says, “The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.”

However, it is also clear from Scripture that those who had miraculous abilities at times misused those gifts and even led others astray. Paul discusses several ways miraculous abilities were abused by the Corinthian church. Tongue-speakers were arrogant about their gift, utilizing their gift to speak over one another, caring nothing for the edification of others (1 Cor. 14:17; 1 Cor.14: 27-28). Prophets were guilty of the same offense of using their gift for their own glory by speaking over one another (1 Cor. 14:31-32). Women were exercising their gifts in the worship assembly and violating God’s law in the process (1 Cor. 14:34-36).

Additionally, those who used miraculous abilities, even correctly, may at other times have led some astray. The church in Corinth clearly had problems because of the influence of brethren engaging in sinful practices, from division over preaching style (1 Cor. 1-4), acceptance of gross immorality (1 Cor. 5), lawsuits and participation in gross immorality (1 Cor. 5-6), misuse of Christian liberty to the



point of ruination of a brother (1 Cor. 8), idolatry (1 Cor. 10), false teaching on the resurrection (1 Cor. 15), etc. Surely many of the brethren involved in these sinful practices had the ability to work miracles, which would have enhanced their ability to lead others into these sinful practices. Paul even makes reference to them when he says, “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power” (1 Cor. 4:19).

Peter showcased the harmful influence a miracle worker could have. When Peter withdrew from eating with Gentile Christians, Paul says, “Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed” (Gal. 2:11). A better translation of blamed is “condemned.” Peter’s action was sinful and would have affected his salvation, if he did not repent. However, notice what impact Peter’s action had on others. “And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:13). The influence of Peter affected the other Jews, even Barnabas himself, to the point that they stood condemned with Peter. The influence of one with the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter, had a profoundly negative impact when he engaged in a sinful practice.

Those addressed by Jesus in Matthew 7:22 are Christian people, with the ability to work miracles, who mistakenly believed they were obeying the Lord’s will. Apparently, they were performing some duties God desired of them, miraculous workings, but they were not performing other duties that God required. So, they obeyed some of God’s commands, but not all of them.

Does this not describe so many of our brethren today? While the miraculous age came to a close around 100 A.D. (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 13:8-13), certainly there are many

Christians today who display great non-miraculous works which benefit God's kingdom. Yet, those who have been Christians for a length of time can think of instances where some who were seemingly faithful and doing good works were in actuality hiding sin, or disobedience to God. I know of instances where deacons embezzled money from the church, elders secretly engaged in immoral conduct, and preachers hid their substance abuse.

Yet, we can also think of instances where many Christians are performing some good works for God, but also performing unlawful works **believing them to be lawful**. How many wonderful preachers in the Lord's church at one time, later changed their doctrine and became false teachers, not realizing they were engaged in unlawful acts, but believing they were teaching with the approval of Jesus? How many Christians are diligently working for the Lord's cause in the local congregation, without realizing they are in adulterous marriages? How many Christian women are performing wonderful works for the Lord Monday through Saturday, but mistakenly overstep their authority on Sunday, believing they are doing the Lord's will? How many of us, while obeying many of the commandments of Jesus, mistakenly believe that certain other commands we are neglecting will not keep us out of heaven; commands against lying, gossip, sowing discord, etc.; commands enjoining worship attendance, evangelism, love, etc.? How many Christians will be surprised on judgment day and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not...?"

### **The Reality Is Condemnation**

While these Christians may live their lives with the mistaken notion that God approves of all they do, their sad reality will be readily apparent. "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice

lawlessness!” (Mat. 7:23). The word for “declare” is the same word translated “confess” in Romans 10:9, referring to the great confession a person makes unto salvation, the confession that Jesus is Lord. Here, Jesus will make public confession stating He never knew them because of their lawless practices. Arndt says that the word “knew” means, “I have never recognized you” (200). Their failure to obey made it impossible for Jesus to know them as faithful followers. The word “practice” is said by Arndt to mean, “to do or accomplish something through work” (389). Their partial obedience and partial disobedience only accomplished “lawlessness,” or sin. Lenski says, “The result of this central perversion is that all works radiating from this center are likewise perverted” (308). Apparently faith only accomplishes only lawlessness and condemnation.

Jesus further illustrates the great foolishness of a Christian living this kind of life. He tells a parable of two home builders in Matthew 7:24-27. Christians will live their lives in one of two ways. The wise Christian will build his spiritual house on a solid foundation of obedience to God’s word. Foolish Christians will build their spiritual homes on an insecure foundation of partial, or incomplete, obedience. The difference in the two homes is startling. When the wise Christian encounters the supreme storm of life, his death, his spiritual house will stand. He will enter heaven because he obeyed God’s word. The foolish Christian’s spiritual home will fall at the close of his physical life because the foundation of his life was not complete obedience to God.

How sad it will be when Jesus utters this same sentence of condemnation to some of our own brethren and maybe to some of us. We may believe that faith only, or even partial obedience, is all that is required, or that God’s grace will cover up any disobedience. Jesus plainly states that even

those who perform great deeds for the kingdom of God, but still practice lawlessness, will not enter heaven. How many of us are like the foolish man, who believes his house is “solid enough” because he attends worship services and places some money in the collection plate? How many of us are living in a spiritual home that will collapse around us upon death because we did not treat the entire word of God as holy and necessary?

How can we know if we are among those foolishly believing we are saved when we are lost in actuality? First, this state is a result of ignorant disobedience. Thusly, we must **study** the law, the Bible, to ensure we are in compliance. “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).

Secondly, per Matthew 7:20, we can **evaluate** our fruitfulness for the cause of Christ. If we can discern false teachers by their fruit and also understand that certain fruit is bad, we can evaluate our fitfulness as fruit producers for God. If we are not bearing fruit, or the fruit we are bearing destroys the church or hinders others from coming to Christ, we must be in a lost condition. “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Cor. 13:5).

### **Conclusion**

While it is sad when those outside of Christ are lost, it will be a much greater tragedy when many Christians are surprised to find they are among that group. It will be truly tragic when those who should have known better, those standing on faith only, and those who believed they were saved but did not fully obey, come to the stark realization that they are eternally lost. Oh the thought of spending eternity

with the realization that through greater study and more reflection we could have been saved; to spend eternity lamenting being so close yet so far away! The world may believe that they are saved simply by professing Jesus as Lord, that faith alone saves, or that partial obedience is all that is required. **Let it never be said to the children of God, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”**

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## But Of That Day And Hour Knoweth No Man

*Keith Ritchie*



Keith Ritchie has been married to Lynn for twenty years, and together they have one daughter, Nina. He attended Faulkner University. Keith has done local work in North Carolina and Georgia. Since 2008, Keith has worked with the congregation in McCaysville, Georgia; he also served as their youth minister in 1992. He has served as the director of the

McCaysville Lectureship for the past ten years.

The twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew has been abused and twisted by men for many years. Those seeking to blind the simple to gain a multitude of followers have used Matthew 24 to put fear of impending persecution in their hearts and minds. In doing so they twist the scriptures “unto to their own destruction” (KJV, 2 Pet. 3:16). I can remember as a young man having difficulty understanding Matthew 24 and trying to grasp its meaning. One evening I attended a gospel meeting in my area. The preacher was preaching on Matthew 24, and I remember being excited to hear this chapter was going to be preached. When I left the meeting I was more confused than when I had first arrived. The visiting preacher stated that he himself “had a hard time understanding Matthew 24,” but he preached on it anyway. Throughout the chapter, he would go a few verses and say, “This is still yet to come,” then after the following few verses he would say, “This has already taken place.” The problem he really had at that point was Matthew 24:34, the key verse in the chapter. It wasn’t until I bought a little yellow book entitled *Matthew 24* by James Meadows that I finally had

what I think to be a good understanding of that chapter.

A great number of false prophets have set dates for the perils contained in the chapter, as well as the second coming of our Lord. In this lesson we will be looking at Matthew 24:36 and will consider some lessons that can be learned. To aid us in the study of this text, we will also consider its parallel in Mark 13:32.

### ***Progression In The Text***

There would have been no doubt in the minds of the apostles that Jesus was progressing here. We have Jesus changing direction from “those days” to “that day.” Notice the following verses prior to verse 36:

- “And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck **in those days!**” (Mat. 24:19).
- “And except **those days** should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened” (Mat. 24:22).
- “Immediately after the tribulation of **those days...**” (Mat. 24:29).

In verse 36 Jesus says “that day and hour.” The expression used by Jesus here is used elsewhere in the New Testament. “Many will say to me in **that day...**” (Mat. 7:22). “But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at **the day** of judgment, than for you.” (Mat. 11:22). “Marvel not at this: for **the hour** is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice” (John 5:28).

This expression continues through the rest of chapter 24 and into chapter 25. Not only do we see the progression from “those days” to “that day and hour,” but we also see a progression in the particulars of His second coming. Through verse 34 there are signs given so people could know the destruction of Jerusalem was near. But concerning the second coming of Jesus, there will be no signs. “Watch therefore: for



**ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”** (Mat. 24:42). “Therefore be ye also ready: for **in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”** (Mat. 24:44). “**The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of”** (Mat. 24:50). “Watch therefore, for **ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.**” The progression here is clear and undeniable.

### ***Particulars Unknown To People***

The particulars of the second coming of Christ are unknown to man. Verse 36, as well as its parallel, is very clear in its message of who will not know and who will know that day and hour. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Mat. 24:36). In Mark’s account Jesus said, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man” (Mark 13:32). Yet, this has not kept man from attempting to set dates concerning Christ’s second coming and the end of the world. For many years some have attempted to place a date on Christ’s return by using astrology, mathematic equations based on numbers in the Bible, and by ignoring verse 36, thereby using the signs found in chapter 24 as signs we should apply to modern times. This brings us to the pretending prophets who have deceived a multitude of people through the years.

### ***Pretending Prophets***

Trying to place a date on the second coming of Christ (the end of the world) is not a new practice. One does not even have to leave Mathew 24 to see this would happen prior to Jerusalem’s destruction. Not only were these pretending prophets saying the Christ had come (thereby pretending to know the day and hour), they were also pretending to be the Christ: “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Mat. 24:5). “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Mat. 24:11).

“Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not” (Mat. 24:23). A list of over two hundred pretending prophets concerning the second coming of Christ and the end of the world are given on [www.bible.ca](http://www.bible.ca).

In the eighteenth century, Jacques Bernoulli, a mathematician, set the date as April 5, 1719, with the return of a comet that was supposed to destroy the earth (McCraney). A fifteenth-century Catholic, Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa, predicted the end of the world to be between the years 1700 and 1734 (Maxey 9). John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, wrote that “the time, times and half a time” of Revelation 12:14 were 1058-1836, “when Christ should come” ([www.bible.ca](http://www.bible.ca)). Wesley also believed the “Millennium began in 1836” (ibid). A Baptist preacher by the name of William Miller is one of the most well-remembered in the list of pretending prophets. It is said of him: “William Miller was the founder of an end-times movement that was so prominent it received its own name—Millerism.” From his studies of the Bible, Miller determined that the second coming would happen sometime between 1843-1844. A spectacular meteor shower in 1833 gave the movement a good push forward. The build-up of anticipation continued until March 21, 1844, when Miller’s one-year time table ran out. Some followers set another date of October 22, 1844. This too failed, collapsing the movement. One follower described the days after the failed predictions: “The world made merry over the old Prophet’s predicament. The taunts and jeers of the ‘scuffers’ were well-nigh unbearable” (ibid). The Jehovah’s Witnesses have tried to predict the second coming of Christ many times over. The years they predicted the end of the world are: 1914, 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941, 1975, and even as late as 1994 (ibid).

In more modern times we see those who have made large monetary profits on falsely predicting Jesus’ return.

Harold Camping is one of these individuals. Camping wrote a book entitled *Are You Ready* in which he predicted the end of the world in September 1994 (ibid). His book contained methods by which Bible numbers were added up equaling to the year 1994. Harold Camping's failed prediction would not stop him from making another one. In 2011, Camping was at it again and predicted the end of the world to be May 21, 2011 (ibid). He owned fifty-five radio stations and advertised his predicted date on six thousand billboards throughout our nation (ibid). Many people sold possessions and gave money to Camping in preparation for this date. On May 22, 2011, they realized they should have listened to the Christ and not Harold Camping.

There is a group who call themselves "unsealed" who have now made a prediction that September 23, 2017, will be the day. This group attempts to use astrology to teach premillennialism and falsely predict events. Even though they have a video showing the September 23, 2017, date, they write that sometime between the fall of 2017 and fall of 2024 the Lord will return. The group's astrological arguments are so involved I will not take the time to put them in this manuscript. It does not matter how many men or groups of men predict the end of the world and second coming of Jesus, the simple truth remains the same, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man" (Mat. 24:36).

### ***Proclaimers Of God's Messages***

Angels, those proclaimers of God's messages, are mentioned as being among those who do not know when Jesus' second coming will be (Mat. 24:36). It was the angel Gabriel who was standing on the right side of the altar of incense and told Zacharias that his prayer had been heard and Elizabeth would bear them a son (Luke 1:11-20 ). It was the angel Gabriel who foretold the conception of the Christ to

Mary (Luke 1:26-38). The angel of the Lord announced to Joseph that Mary, his betrothed, was with child of the Holy Ghost (Mat. 1:20-21). It was also the angel of the Lord who rolled the stone from the tomb of our Lord then sat upon the stone (Mat. 28:2). The angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison for the apostles (Acts 5:19). It was also the angel of the Lord who freed Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10). In Matthew 13:37-43, Jesus explains a parable in which angels will have a part in the second coming and end of the world. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 13:41-42). Even though they will take part in the second coming of Jesus, this does not mean they know when it will be. They are created beings ever-ready to do the Lord’s bidding, yet they do not know when “that day or hour” will be.

***First Person In The Godhead***

In both Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, it is the Father who knows “that day and hour.” The Father is the first Person in the Godhead. The Father was there at creation (Gen. 1:26). The Father was there when the language of man was confounded (Gen. 11:6-7). The Father sent John to baptize (John 1:33). It was the Father who said at the baptizing of the Son, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mat. 3:17). The Father also reiterated this on the mount of transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5). It was the Father who heard the prayers of the Son in Gethsemane when His Son’s soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death (Mat. 26:39-44). The apostle Paul told the Ephesians there is “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6). It is the Father who knows “that day and

hour.” And at the time Jesus spoke these words, it was the “Father only” (Mat. 24:36).

### ***Prince Of Peace***

In Mark 13:32 (the parallel to Matthew 24:36), the Son is mentioned as being one who does not know when the second coming and end of the world will be. There are two views to consider concerning this. Some believe Jesus still does not know “that day or hour” due to His role as the Son. As His position as the Son He puts down all earthly rule, authority, and power, and delivers the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). This view holds that Jesus is still in some way subject to the Father. Then there are those who believe since Jesus humbled Himself and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5-8) that He did not know “that day and hour” at the time He was on this earth due to His humanity and submission to the Father. But now, since He has been given all power (authority) in heaven and in earth (Mat. 28:18), He now knows. If Christ was given all authority in Heaven, and we know He was, would He not now know? In Colossians 2:9 we read that in Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. If that is true, and we know that it is, it is only reasonable to come to the conclusion that our Lord would now know “that day and hour.” In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Bob Winton states, “While the Savior was on earth, he did not know when that time would be, but now that he has re-assumed the fullness of his Godhead, and is not limited by the flesh in any way, he may know.” Wayne Jackson says, “Not even Christ, during his personal ministry, knew when that day would occur (cf. Mk. 13:32). This was due to his self-limitation of certain knowledge while on earth.”

### ***Preparation***

Whether our Lord knows or does not know “that day and hour” has no bearing on our eternal destination. The fact

that remains is, “that day and that hour” is coming, for God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2). Preparation is the overriding theme of the verses following Matthew 24:36 through the next chapter. Three times Jesus warns them to “watch” or to “be ready”. “**Watch** therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Mat. 24:42). “Therefore **be ye also ready**: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mat. 24:44). “**Watch** therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Mat. 25:13). Even in Mark’s account, in the following verse Jesus is very direct in His doctrine of preparation. “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33). The last three verses of Mark 13 teach preparation and readiness. The last word in Mark 13 sends a resounding message to us all of the necessity of readiness. “And what I say unto you I say unto all, **Watch**” (Mark 13:37). May we ever be ready and remain faithful unto death so we can receive that crown (Rev. 2:10).

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## A.D. 70 Doctrine

*Drew Leonard*



Drew Leonard and his wife, Hannah, are from Concordia, Missouri. Drew received his education from the Tri-Cities School of Preaching in Elizabethton, Tennessee, Wentworth College in Lexington, Missouri, and the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri. He is a Bible class teacher at the Concordia church of Christ. He is the author of several books including textual studies on Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation. His book, *A.D. 70 – Taking a Look at Hyper-Preterism*, has led to his engaging in a debate on the bodily resurrection in August of 2017.

### Introduction

Within the past few years, the A.D. 70 theology has resurfaced. What Max R. King introduced to us years ago has been reiterated now by new faces. If you're keeping up with the happenings in the brotherhood (on social media especially), you'll see how "aggressive" the proponents of this doctrine have become. (Anybody thinking that the doctrine is not rapidly stirring disease in the Lord's body is naive, I'd say.) If the proponents are teaching truth, then—by all means—they should be aggressive with their position; however, it is my studied opinion that this doctrine is not only wrong but that it is also fatal to the souls of those engaged in it. (See 2 Timothy 2:17-18 for the seriousness of the matter.) With that said, elders, take note! It is your job to safeguard the flock (Acts 20:26-32; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). In this manuscript, I will expose the teachings of the A.D. 70 theology. Elders, we cannot sit idly as this doctrine increasingly permeates the Lord's body.

As a brief side note, whatever I introduce in this

manuscript but fail to deal with is dealt with in my book, *A.D. 70 – Taking a Look at Hyper-Preterism*. You can find further detail in that book and in my commentaries on Daniel and Revelation.

### **What Is Being Set Forth**

As strange as it may be, the A.D. 70 theology sets forth the position that all prophecy was fulfilled in the year of A.D. 70 when Jerusalem fell at the hands of the Roman army (King, *Spirit* 172). Passages like Matthew 5:17-18, Daniel 9:24-27, and Luke 21:22 are used to support this idea (Leonard, *A.D. 70* 47-60). Lack of space prevents me from dealing with those passages, but the crux of the theory is that everything was fulfilled in A.D. 70. Yes, the theory holds that the final coming of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the atonement, the complete establishment of the kingdom, the final judgment, the “end of the age,” and the emptying of the Hadean world all took place in the year of A.D. 70 at the fall of Jerusalem. This is the position that will be examined.

### **Problems With Words**

Among others, one of the major problems that the theorists face is a problem with certain words in certain passages. Take a look at some of their blunders:

#### ***The Greek Μέλλω (Mello)***

It was Don K. Preston who said, “The fact is that the primary meaning of ‘mello’ with the infinitive is ‘about to be, to be on the point of’” (*Gross* 4). It’s not a hidden thing that the theorists have promoted the Greek μέλλω (*mello*) as indicating “imminence.” They promote this argument because passages like Acts 17:30-31, Romans 8:18, and others use the word...and they want those passages (which speak of the bodily resurrection and the final judgment) to be said to be “imminent” within the first century. In other words, they



argue—from the Greek word—that these things were to be fulfilled in A.D. 70 because they were (allegedly) said to be imminent. This has several problems...

First, Dr. Cates, in his brief manuscript on the theory, introduced Acts 26:22-23 and Romans 5:14, showing how the Greek μέλλω (*mello*) appears in the texts, but that the timing of those events was extremely distant (37-38). (Go ahead, take a look at the phrase “to come” in Romans 5:14 for yourself!) In other words, the appearance of the Greek term in those passages spoke of things that were to come in the future but were by no means “imminent.”

Second, regarding Romans 8:18, McGuiggan said, “There are those who build major doctrines on explicit claims that ‘mello’ always means ‘nearness’ of fulfillment. The data is very clear on the matter. Check for yourself that this isn’t true” (*Romans* 247).

Third, we easily note that Preston’s argument on the word says that when “mello” appears with the infinitive, then “imminence” is demanded. King, in his debate with McGuiggan, argued that “mello” is the temporal equivalent of “at hand” (*Debate* 210). Now, the theorists see Matthew 16:27-28 as being about A.D. 70’s judgment (King, *Spirit* 152; Preston, *Elements* 121). Thayer’s Greek Lexicon notes that in Matthew 16:27-28, we find the usage of “mello” with the infinitive (396). So what does all of that mean? It means that in Matthew 16:27-28—per the theorists!—Christ said that the A.D. 70 judgment was “imminent!” Now, compare that with 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 where Paul comes out and says the “day of the Lord” is not imminent (KJV)! Do you see the problem? Christ, in speaking of A.D. 70 in Matthew 16:27-28—per the theorists—said that it was “imminent,” but then Paul came along approximately 20 years later and told the Thessalonians that the “day of the Lord” (in A.D. 70, per

the theorists) was not “imminent!” The theorists’ argument here forces Paul and Christ to contradict each other. Christ was saying, “A.D. 70 is close” while Paul is writing to saints, “A.D. 70 is not close.”

We’re told, however, that 2 Thessalonians 2 in the King James Version is not accurate, however (Preston, *Elements* 101-102). We’re told that the text should read, “...as if the day of the Lord has already come,” which seems to give the idea that the “day of the Lord” hadn’t come in A.D. 51 or 52 when Paul was writing, but that it would come in A.D. 70 at Jerusalem’s fall (Preston, *Elements* 101-102). I’ll simply tell you that the scholars lean in favor of the text as reading, “...as if the day of the Lord is imminent” (Robertson 48; Vincent 63). And to quote Don K. Preston himself from his video series, “Why I Believe Jesus Returned in 70 A.D.,” he knows just enough Greek to get himself into trouble (*Why*).

The truth is that 2 Thessalonians 2 has the “end of time” in mind, but Matthew 16:27-28 does not express imminence by the appearance of the word. (I think there’s credibility for seeing Matthew 16:27-28 as being in A.D. 70 though.) Their argument on “mello” simply does not stand.

### **“Delivered Up” Of 1 Corinthians 15:24**

King argues that “delivered up” would be better rendered as “to raise it up” or “to restore it to its rightful place” (*Spirit* 234). Simply, McGuiggan demanded lexical authority from King for his personal definition of the Greek παραδίδομι (*paradidomi*) in 1 Corinthians 15:24 (*Debate* 110). Needless to say, King never produced such. If we take the proper rendering of παραδίδομι (*paradidomi*) in 1 Corinthians 15:24, it is quite obvious that Christ’s delegated rule did not cease in A.D. 70, which is why the theorists must redefine and rearrange. What 1 Corinthians 15:24 does have in mind is when Christ will cease reigning by virtue of His

delegation (at some future time) and reign eternally by virtue of His deity. (I'd encourage a reading of pages 96-97 of Jim McGuiggan's *The Reign of God* along this line.) I'm hesitant of the view that says that Christ will stop being my King. See Luke 1:32-33. No, when "time" ends, Christ will cease reigning by virtue of His delegation; He'll continue reigning eternally by virtue of His deity.

***"To" Of Daniel 7:13-14***

The theorists have the kingdom's establishment in A.D. 70, so naturally, Daniel 7:13-14 was fulfilled in A.D. 70 in their eyes. The problem with this is that the theorists have explicitly argued (appealing to the Septuagint) that Daniel 7:13-14 says, "As the Ancient of days, he came..." (King, *Spirit* 232). McGuiggan, however, answered King's argument by saying:

And then we hear that the Man is, IS, mark you, the Ancient of days! He was not 'brought...near before him' but he WAS him! Can you beat that? Reader, are you still in Dan. 7? Read 7:13 for me! Was the Son of man brought to the Ancient of days or was he the Ancient of days? And how does Max know the Son of man IS (and was not brought to) the Ancient of days? The Septuagint renders it this way? And because the Septuagint renders it this way does that mean it is so? Is the LXX [Septuagint D.L.] superior in text to the Hebrew? Is that the opinion of the world's scholarship, Max? Now: I have before me the LXX and it doesn't say this Max! Now your honesty is at stake. I believe you made a mistake but will those who don't

know you? Explain yourself! And Max, the LXX says what my ASV says! Explain yourself! (*Debate* 142)

No, Daniel 7:13-14, in spite of what the theorists suggest, says that the kingdom was going to be established when Christ went “to”—not from!—the Ancient of Days. I’m sure that this happened per Acts 1:9-11. (And do you see how King simply removed the word “to” from his interpretation of Daniel 7:13-14?) This is problematic.

### **Problems With “Comings”**

Jackson is positively correct in suggesting that there are several “comings” divided into “literal” and “figurative” “comings” of the Lord (32). Take a glance at Isaiah 19:1, Micah 1:2-3, John 14:18, John 14:23, Acts 3:20, Romans 11:25-27, Revelation 2:5, Revelation 2:16, and Revelation 3:20, and you’ll see what I’m saying. There are “comings” of the Lord in blessing, in judgment, etc., but when speaking of the “personal” appearance of the Lord, there are only two: when He came as man and when He shall appear the second time (Heb. 9:28).

The A.D. 70 judgment included, undoubtedly, a “coming” of the Lord (Mat. 24:29-31; Jam. 5:8-9). The “coming” in A.D. 70, however, was not a “personal” coming of the Lord. Even the A.D. 70 proponents readily admit that it was not a “personal” appearance—they say that it was figurative (King, *Spirit* 176). Such an admission is shattering to their view though. Why? Because they argue that Hebrews 9:28’s “coming” of Christ is the A.D. 70 “coming” (Preston, *Hymenaeon* 54). If that is the case, however, it should not be the “second” appearance of Christ! See, if A.D. 70’s “coming” of the Lord was a “figurative” one—as the theorists argue—then it should have been maybe the eleventh, twelfth,

or thirteenth “coming” of the Lord, not the “second”! Neubauer readily admits that Isaiah 19:1 includes a “presence” of the Lord, but then if the Lord appeared (1) “figuratively” in Isaiah 19:1, (2) “figuratively” in Micah 1:2-3, and (3) “figuratively” in A.D. 70, then the final “coming” of the Lord (in A.D. 70, as the theorists argue) should not remotely be labeled as the “second” coming per Hebrews 9:28 (4).

The reason that we are able to say that Christ’s final coming will be the “second” coming is because He has only appeared “personally” and “bodily” once before. Acts 1:9-11 assures that His “second” coming will mirror the first: personally and with a body. The theorists simply cannot believe that the “second coming” occurred in A.D. 70; at best, they can argue that the final coming was in A.D. 70, but that still ignores Hebrews 9:28’s label that it will be the “second” appearance, and it is self-contradictory to their claims that the “coming” in A.D. 70 was the “second” coming and that it was figurative (King, *Spirit* 172).

### **Problems With The Lord’s Supper And The Kingdom**

The theorists argue extensively that the kingdom was not established until A.D. 70 (King, *Debate* 249). Oh, they “crawfish” heavily by saying that it began to be established at Pentecost, but the fact remains that if the kingdom were incomplete until A.D. 70, then it was not established. (See my *A.D. 70 – Taking a Look at Hyper-Preterism* and the McGuiggan-King Debate for more here, arguing that “completely established” is equal to “established” and that something’s not being “completely established” is still equivalent to “un-established.”) How is this problematic? Watch...

King’s argument—shockingly—is that the saints did not even enter the eternal kingdom until after the battle with

the beast of Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 (*Spirit* 257-258). But keep in mind that King's position is that the "battle with the beast" was completed in A.D. 70 with Jerusalem's fall (*Spirit* 349-389). This means that the saints did not enter the kingdom—per King's view—until the A.D. 70 demise. This forces us to ask, then, "Where were the saints when they were partaking of the Lord's Supper?" See, Acts 2:42, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11, and other passages show saints partaking of the supper before A.D. 70, but how could they, when it was Christ who said, "I'll not take of the supper until I take it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mat. 26:29)? The fact that the saints were taking of the supper before A.D. 70 indicates the establishment of the kingdom before A.D. 70, but it especially indicates that the saints were in the kingdom before A.D. 70. (See also Colossians 1:13.) See, King's argument (implicitly) is that the saints shouldn't have been partaking of the supper before A.D. 70. Let me go further...

1 Corinthians 11:26 says that the supper was to be taken until Christ's coming. In other words, the partaking of the supper anticipates the second coming of Christ. (Now, the theorists will establish an effective negative by showing passages where the words "until" or "till" must not indicate a point of termination, but I'm sure that's not Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 11:26.) So, I hold that the A.D. 70 theology also (implicitly) demands that the saints shouldn't partake of the supper after A.D. 70, lest they be guilty of anticipating a "coming" of Christ after A.D. 70, which they clearly deny. Put those two things together then...

If the supper were not to be taken before A.D. 70 (because the kingdom was not yet established or entered by the saints) and if the supper is not to be taken after A.D. 70 because it would anticipate a futuristic "coming" of Christ, then when, pray tell, is the supper to be taken? Do you see the

argument? Do you see how the supper is a pointless ritual without a time for it to be taken? It's not supposed to be taken before A.D. 70, lest the kingdom be established and entered before its time, but it's not supposed to be taken after A.D. 70, lest a future "coming" of Christ is anticipated. We'd be forced to conclude, then, that the supper is pointless. This doctrine implicitly, in my opinion, demands this.

### **Problems With Resurrection**

The "resurrection of the dead" is, in my opinion, the most critical aspect of the A.D. 70 theology. Naturally, 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of the "body" that is to be resurrected. All of that seems clear to us to mean that the physical body will be "quicken" at Christ's second coming (1 Cor. 15:23). The A.D. 70 theorists, however, because they see all prophecy (and everything, in general) as being fulfilled in A.D. 70, must find a way to have the "bodily resurrection" occurring in A.D. 70. They tell us that the "body" is not the physical body, but instead, it is the body of Israel, the body of Jews (Neubauer 4; McGuigan, *A.D. 70* 17).

#### ***The Body Of Israel?***

Instead of seeing the "body" as the physical body, the theorists tell us that it was the body of Judaism that began to be put to death in A.D. 30 (or 33) at the cross and then finally died in A.D. 70; they tell us that the body of Christ, the church, began to be resurrected in A.D. 30 (or 33) at Pentecost and finally came out of the grave in A.D. 70 (King, *Spirit* 337-343). King argues extensively that the period from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 was a time for Israel's "progressive" resurrection (*Spirit* 337-343). It was a process. Neubauer states, "As spiritual death [in Judaism, D.L.] was being destroyed, a new spiritual rule [in the church, D.L.] was being created" (7). See, the theorists have the "body" of Israel dying from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 and rising into the church from A.D.

30 to A.D. 70. In fact, King’s exact terminology is that these were “concurrent” actions (McGuiggan, *A.D. 70* 18). Do you see the problem with this?

If the “body” of Israel is what is dying and rising simultaneously, then that is not resurrection! Max King has the “body” rising in A.D. 30 when the body wouldn’t even die—per his own view!—until A.D. 70. Now, keep in mind that Paul hotly branded such a view by saying, “Fools, if you’re going to have a resurrection, the body has to die first!” Go ahead, take a look at 1 Corinthians 15:36! See, McGuiggan accurately shatters this idea by saying, “If it [the new body, D.L.] exists alongside of the Old, it is an independent covenant and we are back with two bodies” (*A.D. 70* 18). In other words, if the Old Covenant and the New Covenant were co-existent at any point in time (and what do you think King means by a “process” of “concurrent” dying and rising?), then it simply is not resurrection to the “body” of Israel, only one body. The “body” of 1 Corinthians 15, for this reason alone, simply cannot refer to the body of Israel as the theorists argue extensively.

### ***Christ’s Resurrection Sets The Context***

Now, doesn’t Christ’s resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 set the tone for the bodily resurrection as Paul discusses it? The fact that Christ’s three-day resurrection is appealed to by Paul should settle the matter: that it is a physical resurrection. This fact is so established in the start of the chapter that we find Max King jumping to Romans 11 to establish what he says is the proper context of 1 Corinthians 15; he does that because Romans 11:15 is a resurrection to Israel, and he wants 1 Corinthians 15 to function in the same way (*Spirit* 344-345). Also, the fact of a three-day physical resurrection of Christ is so obvious in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 that Preston said, “That was, however, a sign (John 20:30-



31)” (*Hymenaeae* 33). A sign of what? A progressive resurrection of the “firstfruit” saints from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 (Preston, *Hymenaeae* 33)! King also said that Jesus’ physical resurrection served as a sign of a much greater reality, again, the process resurrection from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70 of the body of Israel (*Spirit* 313). All of that is extremely sketchy, but let me deal with it...

The “body of Israel,” we are told, was in process of resurrecting from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70. So, we naturally ask, “Who was resurrecting before A.D. 70?” The answer, we’re told, is that the “firstfruits” (Jewish converts between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70) were provided with a “provisionary resurrection” in order to bring the fullness of the resurrection about in A.D. 70 (McGuiggan, *A.D. 70* 60). King and Preston establish, at some length, that the Jewish converts (the “firstfruits”) were provided resurrection before A.D. 70 (*Spirit* 335; *Hymenaeae* 33). And so, we’re told that the Jewish converts were resurrected before A.D. 70... but why, then, was Paul, who was supposedly a leading member of the “firstfruits” class, still anticipating resurrection per Philippians 3:10-21? Paul should have already been resurrected, being part of the body of Jews that converted to bring resurrection to its fullness in A.D. 70, but for some reason, he was still anticipating resurrection? Strange...

### ***The Firstfruits And The Harvest***

Also, it doesn’t help the A.D. 70 theorists to make an entire doctrine out of the “firstfruits.” Romans 8:23, a passage they appeal to often, doesn’t talk about Jewish converts, even if James 1:18 does! And then see 1 Corinthians 16:15 and Romans 16:5. Truly, the “firstfruits” just means “first gathered,” and in some cases it does refer to the Jewish converts, as in James 1:18—see Romans 1:16—but the concept is one that speaks of “judgment” and “harvest,”

which is a motif used in places other than only A.D. 70 (Pro. 3:9-10; Isa. 17; Jer. 51:33). While the theorists want to make “firstfruits” intrinsically Jewish converts in the New Testament, it simply doesn’t stand.

Now, doesn’t that get confusing? Who would read the Bible and get that Christ’s three-day resurrection was a “sign” for all of that? Firstfruit converts resurrecting progressively from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70? Is that what Christ’s resurrection in Jerusalem really conveys to us? Hardly... And some of the theorists have realized that. So, in order to make the view slightly more appealing, they have approached the context of 1 Corinthians 15 differently.

### ***Christ Died Spiritually?***

The new view is that Christ’s three-day resurrection was one out of separation from God. In other words, Christ died spiritually and resurrected spiritually, so the resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15 is built upon that kind of thing: a spiritual resurrection, out of sin-death. In fact, some are so eager to teach this that they have said, “...it was His [Jesus, D.L.] SOUL that was made a sin offering!” (Baisden 3). The argument is that Christ’s spirit died (i.e. “was separated from God”) and resurrected to make atonement. This is highly unproven, but also, see Colossians 1:21-22, Hebrews 10:10, and 1 Peter 2:24 and see if it was Christ’s “body” or “spirit” that died in order to make the atonement. No, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 discusses the three-day resurrection of Christ’s body, not spirit, and thus we have the context of 1 Corinthians 15 as being a physical, bodily resurrection.

Furthermore, if Christ “died” spiritually, being separated from God for three days, then Christ should (1) have gone to “torments” and (2) not entered “paradise.” Rogers is positively right when he says, “In fact, physical death doesn’t alter our relationship with God, but it seals it –

one way or the other!” (9). If that is the case, then Christ, who died physically in a spiritually dead state (as the theorists argue), should have gone to torments... but He told the thief that He was going to be in paradise (Luke 23:39-43). Why would Christ go to “paradise” if He was separated from God spiritually? In fact, shouldn’t Christ, dying physically in a spiritually dead state, go to hell, to be separated from God eternally? This is problematic to say the least.

### ***A Few Closing Problems With The Resurrection***

I don’t have time to draw out more points in detail, but I’ll close this section with a few arguments as briefly as possible. First, if the resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 8, Luke 20:34-36, etc. are resurrections spiritually (and that is what was always expected of the New Testament characters), then why was Paul still anticipating resurrection? He should have been resurrected? Also, if it’s a spiritual resurrection, why were Latin saints, Colossian saints, and Ephesian saints resurrected, but Paul not (Rom. 6:3-7; Col. 2:11-12; Eph. 2:1-5)?

Second, if all of the saints were to be resurrected out of sin-death at the same time (in A.D. 70), then what did Paul mean when he said “first” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16? Why would the “dead” in Christ rise spiritually first? It can’t be that they were going to rise spiritually first: the Roman, Colossian, and Ephesian saints were already “quickened” and “risen” out of sin-death. The “rising” must be a physical rising.

Third, Luke 20:34-36 says that resurrection belongs to the “age to come.” We are not yet in the “age to come” (Mark 10:30). The theorists say that we are in the “age to come” and have thus experienced the resurrection. But what are we to make out of John 10:28-29 then? Look at Mark 10:30 which says that “eternal life” belongs to the “age to come,” and look

at John 10:28-29 which expresses the precise quality of “life” to be had in the “age to come.” If we are in the “age to come,” then we simply cannot fall from grace; the impossibility of apostasy is implied with such a position. (Also, by definition, the word “eternal” means that we can’t lose the life if we have it in actuality.) Yet, somehow, Preston still believes that saints (who have been resurrected) can engage in sin and lose life with Christ (*Elements* 244).

I’d argue that the “age to come/that age” is the spiritual age (and we’re not in it yet); the “this age/world” that Christ had in mind in passages like Matthew 12:31-32 and Luke 20:34-36 was not the Jewish Age as some have argued, but rather, it is the physical age. Christ is contrasting the physical age (this age) with the spiritual age (to come).

### **A Brief Note On The Apocalypse**

I have noticed that one of the most popular arguments raised by our brethren against the A.D. 70 theology is that the book of Revelation was written in A.D. 96. (Taylor 498; Jackson 101). I’m sure that I wouldn’t approach the issue by making that argument for a few reasons. First, I humbly accept the early date of the book (Leonard, *Babylon* 52-60; Wallace 15-46). Second, I hold that the entire Apocalypse has been fulfilled, but quite unlike the A.D. 70 theorists, I hold the view that final judgment, the second coming of Christ, the bodily resurrection, etc. are yet to occur. Third, I hold the time signatures of Revelation 1:1-3 and Revelation 22:6-10 to have temporal significance. Fourth, I hold that the book of Revelation discusses the fall of Rome, not Jerusalem, but have respect for Foy E. Wallace, Jr.’s view—that Jerusalem is in mind and that the book is completely fulfilled—greatly. It is not because of their overall view of Revelation that I take great issue with the theorists; it is because, for whatever reason, they have abandoned central doctrines of the faith,

and whatever has led them to that position is simply untenable.

### **Does The A.D. 70 Theology Result In Loss Of Life With Christ?**

Paul said that Hymenaeus and Philetus were guilty of overthrowing the faith of some by teaching that the resurrection had already passed (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Oh, I've heard the argument that Hymenaeus and Philetus were right about their concept of the resurrection (that it was a spiritual thing) but that they were wrong about the timing. The theorists have argued, "If only they had said what they were saying a few years later, they would've had it" (Preston, *Hymenaeus* 127). Frankly, I don't care what or when Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching...Paul's words were tantamount to: "Error on the resurrection causes shipwreck to the faith." I don't need the A.D. 70 theorists to be teaching precisely what Hymenaeus and Philetus were to know that error on the resurrection results in loss of life with Christ and that it is a fellowship issue. The A.D. 70 theorists are like Hymenaeus and Philetus in that they are both wrong on the resurrection; they are like the Muslims on that point also. Sure, they're saying different things, but while they're different on their concepts, they're the same in that they're all wrong on the matter.

### **Conclusion**

The A.D. 70 theorists have several issues that need re-examination. I list fifty-three issues—which still only skim the surface—that they need to work through in the final chapter of my *A.D. 70 – Taking a Look at Hyper-Preterism*. If you're interested in pursuing the matter further, I think you'd do well to obtain a copy of it.

Sure, this manuscript has been brief, but isn't it

enough to alert us of what the theorists are setting forth? I'd encourage us (as preachers and/or elders especially) to—at the very least—make ourselves aware of the doctrine and the aggressiveness with which it is being pressed upon us. The souls that are being attacked by this doctrine are as precious as any. With God's help, may we stop this doctrine and help the souls involved in it.

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## The World: Letting My Light Shine Before Men

*Rob L. Whitacre*



Rob Whitacre was born in Carbondale, Illinois, and was raised near San Antonio, Texas. He is married to Nicole of Nashville, Tennessee. They have one daughter, Hannah, and one son, Jared. His education includes San Antonio College, Abilene Christian University, Southwest School of Bible Studies (2-year diploma and a graduate certificate in Sacred History), and Southern Christian University (B.A.). He has preached in Kentucky and Tennessee and has done mission work in Panama, New Zealand, and Jamaica. Rob has authored two books, *The Old Testament Simplified* and *The New Testament Simplified*. He currently preaches for the Willette church of Christ in Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee, and has served as an instructor at the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching and Biblical Studies.

Our title comes from the words of the greatest evangelist who ever lived. During the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said,

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify

your Father which is in heaven. (KJV, Mat. 5:13-16)

In light of the theme “The End of Time,” could there be a more important teaching of our Lord for His people today? I have been asked to discuss how a child of God can let his light shine by examining evangelistic techniques. I am going to assume the obvious: most who read or hear this lecture already know they need to let their lights shine by teaching the lost. By and large, brethren are not ignorant of the Great Commission. They have heard it quoted over and over again from the pulpit and taught time and time again in Bible classes. In summary, Jesus said that we are to preach, baptize, and teach everyone, everywhere until the end of time (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). Remember, in order to be a Christian you must be a disciple, and in order to be a disciple you must be a teacher (Acts 11:26).

To properly set the stage, and place the import of this topic into the proper perspective, let me share a true story. An eldership requested a meeting to discuss church growth in a rural area. We ended up having a conference call. One of the elders asked, “Brother Rob, please explain how the Willette church of Christ has experienced so much growth, since it is so far removed from any populated area?” My answer: “Personal evangelism.” His response: “Yes we are already doing that, but what outreach ministries or programs are you using to reach the community?” My answer: “Personal evangelism is the way we reach people. We normally have them into our home, sit around a kitchen table, and have a personal Bible study.” Question: “How do you find these contacts?” Answer: “They are everywhere. They sit in our pews, are our neighbors, friends, and even family. Sometimes we reach them through door knocking and using *House to House Heart to Heart*.” Question: “We tried *House to House*

and a few people were offended, so we stopped. What do you think?” Answer: “First, people don’t have a right to be offended. If the truth offends, then the consequences fall on them. Second, we use it in door knocking. We normally use direct mail, but about every two years, we hand deliver an issue while trying to find contacts for personal Bible study. In fact, we have several families faithfully worshipping because of it.” The elder hung up the phone!

Too many brethren believe we can solve our problems with more programs and ministries. We have ministries for the old, young, singles, married, divorced, parents, teens, sick, needy, depressed, but almost nothing for the sinners who need to be saved. Where and who is training soul winners? We are experiencing a generational crisis in personal evangelism. There is a gap that has emerged in the church. There are remnants of a generation who remembers and was part of an exciting movement when the Lord’s church was growing by leaps and bounds. Christians carried the Jule Miller film strips in their cars and went house to house evangelizing. They taught their neighbors, family, friends, and foes. They saw the ratio of Christians to non-Christians drop from 1:207 to 1:84. Next, there is a generation that is a product of this evangelistic explosion. During this time, that ratio went from 1:84 to 1:222. Time will not allow us to examine why and how this occurred. Finally, there is a generation who has neither seen nor heard how the Great Commission works. This new generation is sincere and willing to work but is lacking the practical training on how to win souls. In this manuscript we are going to examine evangelistic techniques that work and don’t work. Our purpose is to further train soul winners in the churches of Christ.

### **Prospects: The Best Tact Is Contact**

An older man who was serving as an elder in a middle

Tennessee congregation drove up to visit during the week. His purpose was to find out how to become a better evangelist. I am not sure how much I helped, but he sure did help me. During our conversation he smiled and said, “Brother Rob, I believe the best tact is contact.” It is a statement that I have never forgotten. At times, we fail to evangelize because we are afraid to make contact. We thus reason, “If I say something and offend them they will never come, but if I say nothing at least they might come.” This is flawed reasoning for two reasons. First, fear is not a virtue. Fear is a diabolical weapon that will cause countless souls to be lost. It is listed first on hell’s role call as given by John. “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). It was fear that caused the one-talent man to hide his abilities. “And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine” (Mat. 25:25). Why are so many people afraid? Jesus said, “And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” (Mat. 8:26). Second, silence is not golden. If we say nothing, the eternal fate of man is sealed. Paul said, “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?” (Rom. 10:14). Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:44-45). Finding prospects to teach is not difficult when we overcome our fear of failure and have enough faith to teach the lost.

Where do I find contacts? Jesus said the fields are white unto harvest (John 6:45). In other words, we are surrounded by potential Bible studies. The harvest in which Jesus spoke can be identified using the following categories.

***First, hot contacts are those sitting in our pews.*** We don't have to knock a door or make a visit to reach them. Not long ago I met with our elders to discuss our vision for 2017. I have been preaching at Willette for almost ten years and have spent most of this time looking outward while all along lost souls were sitting in our pews. Hot contacts include spouses, children, parents, regular visitors, boy/girlfriends, and neighbors in our community that are among us. Some of these prospects are more faithful than our regular members and have attended for years. In many cases relationship building is not even necessary because they feel as though they are already part of the family. In order to reach them, all we need to say is, "Would you like to come over for supper and learn a little more about the church?" I have yet to meet one of these hot contacts who said, "No."

***Second, warm contacts are those who are just one away from the church.*** They are co-workers, fellow students at school, club members, recreational friends, family, and neighbors. The only thing that keeps them from hearing the Gospel are those who refuse to teach them (us)! Warm contacts take a little more work than those who sit in our pews. The relationships will need to be cultivated. Perhaps you will need to help create a connection between them and a personal evangelism teacher. We have found cards, meals, benevolent gifts, prayers, and visits are great ways to build a bridge. Understanding that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care is the foundation of being successful with these contacts.

***Third, cold contacts are the isolated.*** We don't know who they are, and they are very difficult to reach. One way to find them is through door knocking. I know this is a "controversial" term for some based upon their reactions. "I don't believe in door knocking." "Door knocking is not

effective.” “Door knocking does not work anymore.” “Door knocking is a waste of time.” Have you ever heard these statements before? I have heard elders and preachers of the Gospel make these statements. I will concede that door knocking is not the most successful method, and it is one of the most difficult ways to reach souls, but it does work. There is nothing wrong with honest questions for honest listeners. So then, why do we door knock?

***Door knocking is designed to reach the “unchurched.”*** We don’t know them! We don’t know where they live, and we don’t know their friends and/or family. They are the “unchurched” and they exist on every continent, reside in every country, and live in every community. Perhaps they have migrated into the area looking for a job, are running from a problem, or are looking for a new beginning. They have no religious affiliations and perhaps no religious background. They are not all atheists but have no real convictions. They are lost souls who are in desperate need of someone who cares to bring them the good news of the Gospel.

***Door knocking is designed to reach the “unreachable.”*** “Let’s skip that house as they were not receptive last time.” Seasons change, things change, and most importantly, people change. Paul said, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds” (Col. 4:2-3). God may use you to reach a person who is deeply troubled by disease, disaster, or death. It is amazing what time can do to the hardest of hearts. These “doors of utterance” open and shut during different phases of life. They normally open for only short periods of time. You never know what you will find on the other side of a door. I have

found sobbing souls, meditating men, and weary women ready and willing to receive anyone who cares. Door knocking is one way God fulfills His promise of Matthew 7:7-8, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

***Door knocking is designed to reach the “unmovable.”*** “They will never change.” God moved Saul from persecutor to preacher with the power of the Gospel. Everyone can change, but perhaps it is not those outside the building who need to be moved first. We have sat in the pews for years but never moved beyond the doors with the saving message of the Savior. Perhaps the greatest need for movement is with **me**. Door knocking moves a church to do the work God intended; to make known to the world the “manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). The great commission is a going, not a coming commission. If we don’t go, they will never come!

Yes, it may take one hundred doors to find one good prospect, and it may take ten good prospects for one conversion. Did not God tell Philip to go and preach the Gospel to one man (Acts 8:26)? Door knocking is a method to reach those who we cannot find any other way. They are not sitting in our pews and are not known by any Christian. They are not going to read a track, listen to the *Gospel Broadcasting Network*, or pick up *House to House Heart to Heart*. Door knocking is one of the only ways to reach them. There would not be a Jonathon and Stephanie Royal whose son Jonny is attending the Memphis School of Preaching if someone did not believe in door knocking. There would not be a Charles Hunt with a wife and son who have already gone on to their reward at the Willette church of Christ if two

sisters did not knock on his door. The only time door knocking does not work is when we refuse to work it!

**Principle: Stop Conversational Evangelism**

Several years ago a member of a once thriving evangelistic congregation called with some concerns. The congregation had a new preacher who was teaching something he called “conversational evangelism.” At the time, this was a new and unfamiliar term. I asked him to describe this teaching technique. He said, “Personal Bible studies are offensive and ineffective in today’s culture. People are hesitant to study their Bibles. Therefore, we should seek to engage them in religious conversations. In short, have a tea-room talk or coffee-house chat about Jesus. The next step is to invite them to church and let them become comfortable. In time they will eventually become Christians.” I was trying to be open minded so I asked, “How is this working?” His answer was very revealing and conclusive, “We have not had a conversion in two years.”

In the not-too-distant past, faithful Christians prayed to the Father, but now some are “talking” to God. We used to go to Bible classes on Wednesday evening, and now some are having Bible “discussions.” We used to have 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. In a nutshell, it over talks and under teaches. I have found that the more I talk in a study the worse it gets. The converting power of God is His Word. 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). When Jesus answered questions about salvation, he went to the Scripture. “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 readeest thou?” (Luke 10:25-26). When Paul sought to convert the Jews He,

...went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. (Acts 17:2-4)

Once again, talking, conversing, and discussing the Christ is much different than reasoning from the Scriptures. The power is not in earthen vessels but in God’s Word (2 Cor. 4:7). If we want to be successful soul winners we must stop conversational evangelism and start having personal Bible studies!

### **Practice: Start Personal Bible Studies**

There are a lot of Christians who want to evangelize, but they just don’t know where to start. One of the keys to

soul winning is to have a tried and true method. I want to reintroduce *Back to the Bible*. It was originally authored by the late Brother Bobby Bates. He was known as “Mr. Evangelist” and converted thousands of people during his life. It is a three-lesson course that anyone can use. It is simple, scriptural, and successful.

*First, Back to the Bible is simple.* Almost everyone who completes the study says it was easy. Shortly after the conversion of Jonathon and Stephanie Royal, I approached them about their fifteen-year-old son. His name is Jonny. They had told me about his conversion to Christ while they attended a community church in Florida. I was certain the study would commence immediately, but to my surprise they said, “No.” What followed was a lesson to remember. “Do you have any of those *Back to the Bible* booklets? We want to study with him.” Just think, new converts ready to evangelize and teach their son the Gospel. Brethren, if new converts can do it, why can’t those who have been in the pews for decades do it?

There are only three lessons. Each one can be completed in less than ninety minutes. Most questions are fill-in-the-blank or yes-and-no answers. Lesson one is on Bible authority. It is designed to help the prospect understand the need for a “thus saith the Lord” in everything we do. In addition, it clearly shows the difference between the Old and New Testament laws. Lesson two is on the church of Christ. It covers the definition, organization, worship, and identification of the church. Lesson three is on sin and salvation. The last book contains two aids to help a person obey the Gospel. The first is a religious survey that assesses their spiritual condition prior to the study. It is essential that these answers are recorded to help keep the prospect honest. The second aid is the asterisk which indicates a decision point

where the prospect can accept the Lord's invitation. The transition from the Bible study to the baptism is smooth and simple. In most cases, the prospect will respond at the first opportunity.

**Second, Back to the Bible is scriptural.** The booklets are based on the King James Version of the Bible. When a study begins, some worry about the version of the Bible the prospect may use. How do you handle this issue? First, we always have a Gift and Award Bible to give to the prospect. We open it, write their name inside, and hand it to them; most of the time they will use it. Second, if they insist on using their "special" Bible and you find it to be a loose translation, don't make a big deal about it. This is not the time for a Bible study on different versions. We have studied with many people who have used these inaccurate translations without ever having one problem. There are some battles that are not worth fighting at certain times. As a soul winner, we must pick our battles wisely. Solomon once wrote, "The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise (Pro. 11:30).

*Back to the Bible* requires Bible reading. It is very important to focus on having the prospect **read** the Bible, so don't make the mistake of doing all the reading yourself. The Scriptures have the power to break down social, family, and religious barriers when it is placed within the heart. Paul said, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). We must never forget that the Bible is God's weapon against sin and for salvation (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17).

**Third, Back to the Bible is successful.** What happens if a couple completes the three study booklets? Over the past

twenty years we have kept records, and over ninety percent of the time they obey the Gospel. In fact, in the past ten years, only two people have not put on our Lord in baptism. Regardless of the prospect's response, personal evangelism is always successful when we do it. The measure of success is not how many baptisms we record but how many souls we teach. We are charged to plant and water the seed, and God is the One who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

Jesus called us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We have the power to change America in God's Word. The instruments are His people, and we still number over a million. In our distant past, we were able to cut the ratio of Christians to non-Christians in half in just seven years. In the more recent past, we took a major step backward as the ratio of Christians to non-Christians doubled in seven years. We are at a crossroads in America. The church of our Lord is either going to grow, or it is going to shrink. I wonder where we will be seven years from today (2024)? It largely depends on our willingness to go back to the Bible and restore personal evangelism.

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## Will There Be Degrees Of Reward And Punishment?

*Adam Faughn*



Adam Faughn is married to the former Leah Moon, and together they are blessed with two children: Mary Carol and Turner. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University, having received a Bachelor of Arts in History in 1999 and a Master of Ministry in 2003. Adam has preached with the 9th Avenue church of Christ in Haleyville, Alabama, since

December, 2014. Prior to working at 9th Avenue, Adam preached for the Lebanon Road church of Christ in Nashville for 7 years. Adam has spoken at Polishing the Pulpit, Freed-Hardeman, and the Truth in Love lectures, and he has held meetings in various states. Adam is the author of the book *Hymns of the Heart*. He and several members of his family contribute to a website ([alegacyoffaith.us](http://alegacyoffaith.us)) designed to encourage families. In his free time, Adam enjoys reading, listening to podcasts, and keeping up with the world of sports, especially college basketball. But nothing compares to time with his wife and kids!

The title to one grand old hymn states a beautiful truth that so many Christians believe deeply: “Heaven Will Surely be Worth It All.” When we consider the bliss of heaven, our hearts swell with anticipation and excitement. We sometimes speak of things here on earth—maybe beautiful singing—as being “just a taste of heaven,” but absolutely nothing can truly give us a glimpse of just how wonderful that place is.

When we consider heaven, though, we are sometimes left with a question. We wonder if heaven will be the same for everyone there. Will the bliss be equal for all? On the other extreme, we wonder if that awful place of eternal torment, hell, will be the same for all who face its terrible punishment. The way this question has been posed for this

chapter is thus: “Will there be degrees of reward and punishment?” In other words, will some in hell face worse punishment than others, and will some in heaven receive greater joyful reward than others?

From the outset, before diving into Biblical texts, let me affirm this truth: no matter what one concludes on the subject of degrees of punishment or reward, hell will be too awful for us to ever desire entering and heaven will be more glorious than we could ever imagine (see Eph. 3:20-21). That truth must continue to guide our desire to avoid hell at all costs and fuel our desire to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (NKJV, Mat. 6:33). Our heart’s desire, no matter our conclusion to this question, should be the same as that of Paul: “having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phi. 1:23).

With that said, let me affirm that I do believe there will be degrees of reward in heaven and degrees of punishment in hell, and this chapter will seek to share reasons why I believe that to be the case.

### **A Study Of Matthew 11:20-24**

Matthew 11 is indispensable to a study of this subject for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that Jesus Himself—the One who will be the Judge in the great judgment day—is speaking. Certainly, all Scripture is inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), but knowing that the Judge Himself is stating these truths helps us as we seek to understand some facts about that coming day.

Matthew records that Jesus “began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done,” and the rebuke was made “because they did not repent” (Mat. 18:20). Specifically, our Lord pronounces a woe upon the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. For our thoughts, the reason for these pronouncements is not germane, but that

Jesus would compare these cities to other, more notorious locations is very important.

The Lord said to Chorazin and Bethsaida, “For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Mat. 18:21). What we must note about this is that Jesus has perfect knowledge, and that knowledge is not bound by barriers as is ours. You and I can learn from history, but we cannot go back and perfectly discern motives of those who are dead and gone. We certainly cannot know the future, though we might posit some guesses. We are also unable to do more than make an educated guess as to the hearts or motives of those who live in our own day and time.

Jesus, though, was and is not bound by such limitations. He knew perfectly whereof He spoke and could rightfully say that these two wicked cities from Old Testament times would have repented had they seen and heard the same things as these two cities from His own time. We might say that Jesus was speaking about the opportunities afforded to the citizens of each of these towns, and that the citizens of Tyre and Sidon—while still responsible for obedience—did not have the same level of opportunity as did those of Chorazin and Bethsaida. If nothing else, Tyre and Sidon’s citizens did not actually see Jesus, hear His teachings, and witness His “mighty works” (Mat. 18:21).

With that as the background, then our Lord makes this very important statement: “But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you” (Mat. 18:22). In the following two verses (Mat. 18:23-24), a contrast is made between Capernaum of the time of Jesus and the infamous city of Sodom in the Old Testament. In the contrast made, the same conclusion is given: “But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in

the day of judgment than for you” (Mat. 18:24). The reason, again, is opportunity and responsibility.

We must note that our Lord is not saying that Tyre, Sidon, or Sodom will escape punishment. By using the qualifier “more” to describe the toleration of that day, He is making it clear that all these cities are being condemned, but the cities of the day of Christ had a greater responsibility because they were given a greater opportunity. After all, they saw the Messiah in the flesh and some were even granted healing by Him!

Guy N. Woods, speaking specifically of one of these contrasts, writes, “Capernaum, whose opportunities exceeded all others, since our Lord lived there for three years, will be judged by a vastly stricter standard than Sodom, though Sodom will not escape judgment” (229). Thus, we see why Jesus would invoke the shocking name of Sodom—that infamously wicked city of Old Testament times. He was showing how serious it was to spurn the nearly unparalleled opportunity that Capernaum had. They had seen Christ in their midst for three years and had virtually thrown that all away by rejecting Jesus.

From this short section of Scripture, we begin to take away the concept of opportunity and responsibility. While all who are wicked and unrepentant will be punished, some will have spurned many and great opportunities, and their fate at judgment will be less tolerable.

### **A Study Of Luke 12:42-48**

The parables of Jesus are fascinating for nearly countless reasons. One fascination with them, though, is how many different themes are discussed in these short stories of comparison. While many of them (the parables of Matthew 13, for example) deal with the kingdom, other subjects are often discussed. Such is the case, at least in part, with the



parable found in Luke 12:42-48.

Jesus introduces this parable with a powerful statement: “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (Luke 12:43). He then speaks of the servants who, as their master delays his returning, begin to take sinful advantage of his absence, beating other servants and becoming drunk. Jesus also states that the master will return, but it will be “at an hour when [the servant] is not aware” (Luke 12:46).

Verse 47 provides for us the key to our thoughts, however. There Jesus says, “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” Contrasted with that, Jesus then states in verse 48 that “he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.”

It is at this point that Jesus makes His own conclusion and application to the parable. He stated, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Commenting on these verses, brother H. Leo Boles wrote,

It seems that people will be treated according to their opportunities and the light which they have. Opportunity and ability measure one’s responsibility; some have greater opportunities than others; some have greater ability than others; therefore the responsibilities vary; so it seems that the reward and punishment will vary according to the responsibilities...This implies severe punishment and degrees of punishment. (262)

Again, this is not saying that those who have little opportunity and fail will escape punishment but that God recognizes our opportunities and takes that into account. Those who have been given much (many abilities, many opportunities to hear the Gospel, many opportunities to do good to others, etc.) will be held to a stricter standard if those opportunities are squandered than those who may not have as many opportunities (those with mental challenges, less technology with which to hear Scripture, etc.).

This concept, of course, brings to mind another parable of Jesus, that of the talents (Mat. 25:14-30). Simply remember that two of the servants in that parable were faithful and both were rewarded, but the amount they gained varied based upon their ability and opportunity. The two-talent man was not given five talents as a reward for his faithfulness, though both the five- and two-talent men were given the same words of commendation by the master. Notice, too, that the talent from the one-talent man was not split in half and given to both faithful men, but only to the five-talent man.

Jesus makes it clear through these parables a comforting truth: He understands that some have more ability and greater opportunities than others. However, that is also a sobering truth, since we will be held accountable if we are given great opportunities. For most of us, living in the very connected era in which we find ourselves, we are given immense opportunities to share the Gospel and be a blessing to others in the name of our Lord. Are we taking advantage?

### **“According To His Works”**

In Matthew 16:24-27, our Lord was speaking about what we must do to follow Him. It requires sacrifice (“deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”), but it also takes a proper perspective (Mat. 16:24). We are reminded that

we should be unwilling to exchange even the whole world for our soul.

Upon that thought, then, Jesus stated, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Mat. 16:27). It is the little phrase “according to” that should have our attention in this study. That phrase translates the Greek preposition *kata*, and it is translated “according to” more times than any other way in the King James Version and New King James Version. Other common ways it is translated include “after,” “against,” “in,” and “by.” Zodhiates writes this word is “generally used of motion or direction,” then adds it is often used metaphorically “of the [object] toward or upon which anything tends or aims...in respect to” (925).

Here, though, “according to” seems to be the best possible translation, as Jesus is clearly speaking about a standard (“their works”). To borrow from the definition cited above, our judgment will be moved in respect to our works. We will be judged and the standard of reward or punishment will be rendered based upon the works done in this life, upon our faithfulness to the text of Scripture. Wayne Jackson summarizes our point well in writing about this statement from Jesus, “If this does not signify a proportionately fair dispersal, language scarcely has any meaning” (Jackson).

### ***What About The “Eleventh-Hour” Workers?***

In a discussion about degrees of reward in heaven, some will object by pointing to a parable from the lips of Jesus. The parable found in Matthew 20:1-16 has often been cited to talk about entering into the kingdom with some type of “deathbed” salvation. Since a person missed opportunities earlier in life, he or she can come to the Lord, as it were, at the eleventh hour, as these workers did in the parable.

There can be no doubt that God will save a penitent

believer at any point in that person's life. Whether a person comes to God immediately upon hearing the Gospel or waits until his or her final days, if that individual follows God's plan of salvation, God will save. Thus, we must keep teaching people, no matter the age or condition.

The problem, however, is that the parable of Matthew 20 was not likely speaking to that reality. But, even if it is speaking to that reality, it still does not teach against degrees of reward or punishment. We must keep the following in mind as we study this parable.

First, this parable is not necessarily speaking about these deathbed conversions. In fact, many scholars believe Jesus was talking about Gentiles entering the kingdom in these "latter days," while the Jews had had countless opportunities throughout the centuries. To the Jews of Jesus' day, Gentiles were going to be given an "eleventh-hour" opportunity. Many scholars throughout the years have espoused this view of the parable. Among them was Guy N. Woods, who wrote,

It is possible, indeed probable, in the minds of many scholars that [this parable] was delivered to show that the Gentiles, who came in at "the eleventh hour," would enjoy the kingdom (soon to be established when these words were uttered), the same privilege as the Jews who had been the favored and chosen people of the Lord for many centuries. Though last in point of invitation, they were to become first through their acceptance of, and dedication to, the gospel; whereas, the Jews, through their rebellion and disbelief, would be cut off. (231)

But even if this view is incorrect, and the parable is dealing with those who would come to the kingdom in the waning moments or days of their lives, that does not necessarily disprove that there will be degrees of reward in heaven. After all, each person was given the same reward in the parable (a denarius), but each would have appreciated the reward differently. It is to this concept that we now turn.

### ***Human Logic And God's Justice***

Heaven is a place of unrivaled bliss. All who are blessed by the grace and mercy of God to live in heaven for eternity will never be disappointed. All there will be joyful.

That said, simple logic, coupled with the knowledge that God is perfectly just, helps us to see that there will be degrees of reward in heaven. This is true, if for no other reason than that some will have put far greater effort into being faithful with their opportunities in this life than have others; thus, they will appreciate the joy of heaven more, since they lived so much of their lives preparing for that heavenly home.

When many fairly well-off Christians in modern America compare what we must go through to be faithful, we would not hesitate to say that someone like the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, would be more greatly rewarded in heaven. He endured many difficulties that we can scarcely imagine yet remained faithful (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-30). That is not to say that we cannot enjoy heaven—we most certainly will enjoy it more than anything we can imagine—but that one like Paul will be more appreciative and, thus, more greatly rewarded for his faith.

Wayne Jackson helps us think through this logically when he states,

There is no evidence that the human spirit,  
as to its basic constitution, will be changed

by the experience of death. If it is the case, therefore, that we are capable of different levels of satisfaction and enjoyment now, depending upon our capacity for such, it follows that such likely will be the case in the eternal order of things. This seems to be a logical inference.

Couple this logic with knowledge of the perfect justice of God, and we can make a strong argument for degrees of reward in heaven, though we cannot fully grasp what that might look like. I do not think we are able with our limited knowledge to grasp how a place of perfect bliss could be “better” or more joyful for one person than for another. That said, we can grasp that it makes sense that it will be that way and that God’s perfect justice will lead to that truth. Again, we turn to the words of brother Woods: “All who go to heaven will enjoy it to the fullest extent of their ability. The *extent*, however, will be determined by their preparation here” (231).

### **Conclusion**

The half-brother of Christ wrote, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (Jam. 3:1). It is sobering to be teaching on this subject when one of the key verses is a warning to teachers!

That said, both logic and (far more importantly) Scripture seem to clearly indicate that there will be degrees of both punishment in hell and reward in heaven. What that will look like—what that experience will actually entail—we cannot know in this life. Further, it is probably to our benefit that Scripture does not try to reveal to us what those degrees are like, and that is true for at least two reasons.

First, we simply could not grasp the difference. While

we will still be “ourselves” in eternity, there is so much about eternal existence that we simply cannot grasp in this life. It would likely overwhelm us if we could grasp more. Instead, the Lord graciously shows in Scripture what we need to know to be faithful and asks us to trust Him with the particulars of heaven and hell.

Second, there could also be a danger if we saw the particulars. If I saw that hell would be “less tolerable” for some and got it in my head that it might not be “that bad,” that could be a dangerous road. It needs to be reiterated: hell will be unspeakably awful for all who enter there. How it could be worse for some than for others, I cannot know, but I do know I do not wish to be there.

Perhaps a glance at the story of the rich man and Lazarus will serve as a fitting conclusion. I believe the story’s setting is in the hades realm awaiting judgment, but the principle remains the same. One of the most tragic statements made in all Scripture is when the rich man is told by Abraham, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented” (Luke 16:25).

The single word “remember” jumps off the page, and may give us the clearest picture of why hell will be more awful for some. They will remember their opportunities, abilities, and talents, and how they were squandered away in sin, pride, and selfishness. In addition to the darkness, fire, and lack of the presence of God, their own memories will haunt them for eternity.

On the other hand, a beautiful old song may give us some indication as to why heaven will be sweet for everyone, but just a little sweeter for others: “We’ll Understand It Better By and By.” With that knowledge, I do not wish to just ease my way in, scarcely fighting for truth and getting by in faith. I

want to be faithful to the end, no matter the cost, to remember a life lived through some pain, heartache, and difficulty, but always in faith, so that heaven will be as blissful as possible for me. Surely, it will be worth it all.

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## How To Send Your Child To Hell

*Glenn Colley*



Glenn Colley was born in Houston, Texas, and is a third generation preacher. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman University in 1981, has been preaching for thirty-eight years, and has been married to Cindy for thirty-six years. They have two children: Caleb, who is married to Rebekah, and Hannah, who is married to Ben Giselbach. Both of these men preach full time. Glenn and Cindy are the authors of books such as *Awake at Night, You're Singing My Song*, *Your Mama Don't Dance*, *Crown of Creation*, *Women of Deliverance*, *Get Real*, *Melons and Mates*, and *Loose Change*. They have also produced four CDs called *Hannah's Hundred* which are Bible verses set to music to help children memorize Scripture from a very young age. Glenn holds as many gospel meetings each year as local work will allow, and he and Cindy often conduct classes and seminars about the family and home. Glenn has done foreign mission work in campaigns in Africa, South America, India, and Ukraine. He is seen on Gospel Broadcasting Network hosting various programs. Glenn serves on the board of directors for *Lads to Leaders* and *Gospel Broadcasting Network*. He is currently the pulpit minister for the West Huntsville church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama.

The only thing I wouldn't be willing to forfeit to prevent one of my children from going to hell is my own soul for theirs, and truth be told, I'm not sure that I wouldn't give even that. This title is difficult for a Christian father. It compels my imagination to explore what is, in reality, excruciating to ponder. Sometimes, though, framing the unthinkable increases the impact of the painful possibility. In this instance, it makes my determination even stronger—to do all that I can do to keep my children from hell.

There are anomalies on both sides of this eternity question in rearing children. I've known good Christian people whose children left the Lord in early adulthood, and

I've known unrighteous people who raised children to one day become devout Christians. But those are exceptions.

In your mind, divide the training of your children into two categories: (1) training their skills, and (2) training their values. The point of this lesson is this: Giving my children skills without training them in values is a terrible mistake. In so doing, I merely create a more "successful life" from which they may go to hell. Christian parenting involves clarity about the definition of true success. That definition is "living your life and going to heaven." If our children one day fall short of that goal, their lives have been failures. Our goal in child rearing is to produce happy, faithful, productive Christians.

While Christ didn't give us a designated list of values, it's easy enough to formulate such a list by reading His New Testament. Could you make a list of anchor values taught to us by Jesus Christ? Here are a dozen to get your thought processes going:

1. **Love God with all your heart:** "Jesus said to him, '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'" (NKJV, Mat. 22:37).
2. **Have abiding faith and trust in God.** "So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God'" (Mark. 11:22).
3. **Practice strict fidelity in marriage.** "What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (KJV, Mat.19:6).
4. **Put your trust not in earthly things, but heavenly things.** "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).

5. **Resist retaliation.** “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Mat. 5:38-39).
6. **Forgive sins.** “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat. 6:14-15).
7. **Love people unconditionally.** “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat. 5:44-45).
8. **Be humble, as little children.** “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 18:4).
9. **Do good works.** “[I]n all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works” (Tit. 2:7).
10. **Avoid worldliness.** “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).

11. **Practice the golden rule.** “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Mat. 7:12).
12. **Worship faithfully under two mandates.** “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John. 4:24).

For many Christian parents, the greatest challenge is not a failure to involve our children in secular education and related activities. We know how to build their bodies with sports and develop their talents in music and the arts. We know how to encourage good grades and point them to a good university because that’s important. But we may be weak in the much more important parallel teaching in each avenue of learning.

I’m a strong advocate of family Bible time each evening before putting your children to bed. What an excellent way to make sure you are communicating the most important teaching you will ever offer your children: the values of Jesus Christ.

In this lesson, we will examine six Bible characters. They have two things in common. First, they all possessed a skill which is highly esteemed by parents today. Second, they were all lost eternally.

***First, Consider Demas, Who Knew How To Love Life***

Demas was a good man in the beginning. Philemon 1:24 mentions him in a most pleasing light: “Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.” How many of us would love finding our names in a letter from the apostle Paul describing us this way. Yet, this isn’t at all how Demas was described in the last chapter written by Paul before his death. Demas had changed: “for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10).

All parents want their children to love life. The

opposite would grieve our hearts. There are things we do to give our children a bright and optimistic view of life. It is not wrong to love life. Peter wrote, “For he who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit” (1 Pet. 3:10).

Now consider Christ’s values, which should accompany this skill. We should teach our children early that if one does not live righteously, nothing else matters. The success of their lives is gauged this way. Pleasure that conflicts with God’s will is abhorrent to the Christian because he knows there are consequences. When what is right conflicts with their happiness, they must choose doing the right thing anyway. If they get confused about this, their lives are apt to be dominated by failure.

Show them how to love serving God. If you love it, they will too. Find spiritual family projects in which to involve your children. Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and then told them they’d be happy if they’d do similar things (John 13:14-17).

Rear them so that when they’re grown, they will look back on singings and gospel meetings and Bible classes and Lads to Leaders. Let them remember family Bible time at night and how much you enjoyed singing together and talking to and about the Lord.

Prioritize worship. Make a big event of the search for a faithful church as you make vacation plans. Teach them early how to contribute to the treasury.

Teach them the good feeling you get when you have a chance to benefit monetarily or socially from doing the wrong thing, but you choose the right one. From time to time, challenge your children with ethical problems they can ponder and solve. Consider taking your children on a mission trip. They’ll learn to enjoy life in a new and better way. Take them

to the hospitals/nursing homes to visit. They'll understand something about serving and how it brings joy to life.

Don't teach them that celebrations in life can sometimes demand spiritual compromise. Most of the world associates celebrating with alcohol or dancing or other compromises in morality.

Don't teach them the idea that successful Christianity is merely a spiritual weigh-in ("If my good outweighs my bad, I'm good enough."). Don't make decisions in your family which convey to the children, "I've been faithful in so many things; doing a little wrong in some things still leaves me in the black."

Teach them that real joy in life is not found in reckless spending. They must not spend money that they do not have. It will bring long-term sorrow to go into debt while failing to think ahead about creditors and how they are to be paid.

Teach them the fallacy in believing that lying is good if it makes life better or that cheating on my spouse is good if it makes life "happier." Make sure they are clear about how people do a lot of sinning while reasoning, "God wants me to be happy."

### ***Second Is Zimri, Who Took A Stand For Sexual Freedom***

During the wandering years, the Israelites struggled to refrain from assimilating into a wicked, idolatrous culture. In Numbers 25:1-11 we read that God's anger was kindled against His people and here is the reason: "[T]he people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor" (Num. 25:1-3).

God commanded the hanging of the leaders of the movement, and sent a deadly plague through the camp. Thousands died. As the fingers of death reached through the

people, a strange thing happened. A rebellious Israelite named Zimri and his Midianite girlfriend Cozbi, paraded before the congregation of Israel and entered a tent for an apparent conjugal encounter. Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, entered the tent and drove a javelin through them both. God thus stayed the plague and showed His approval of the killing. God was protecting the law in order to preserve a remnant in the nation from which the Christ, as had been prophesied, would come.

The “Zimri mentality” is one of standing up for one’s self, and in his case, his sexual preferences. You see here an attitude that seems hauntingly modern: to take a stand against God for one’s immoral sexuality. It is to take a stand with Satan. This is exactly the attitude parents combat today when rearing children in our United States culture. We have a harshness, a coldness and a division in US politics that we’ve never seen before. It is mostly about protecting sinful sex. It is the belief that one’s body is his own, and no one should have a say about sexual choices he makes with that body; not even God.

Think about current hot-button issues in the news today. Many of them are directly tied to the Zimri mentality. Homosexual marriage is legal in all fifty states, whether states have voted for it or not. Gender fluidity is all the rage. Declare what gender you want to be, join a sports team and change in whichever dressing rooms you prefer. The newest Supreme Court justice was soundly criticized for his opinion that Hobby Lobby should be able to exclude abortion services in the insurance plan given to employees. This was raised as a major reason for rejecting him for the Supreme Court. Hobby Lobby wasn’t yielding to the Zimri mentality but the administration was directly descended from him and his cohort, Cozbi.

Consider Christ’s values to teach your children

alongside the determination to stand up for one's self in matters of morality. Start this teaching before the dating years. Teach them that intimacy is right and good in marriage. Marriage presupposes an intimate relationship (1 Cor. 7:2). Keep the lines of communication open by showing daily interest in what they do. Be a part of the sports your kids like to play or the bands they play in or the theater groups with which they perform. In family Bible time, explain that sex is a godly and healthy thing if it's practiced in a God-approved marriage. Outside of marriage it is sorely dangerous. Hebrews 13:4 warns, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Sex before marriage is against God and is a sin. In connection, draw strong lines about entertainment choices. Colossians 3:1-6 explains that those who've been baptized must put to death sinful things such as fornication, uncleanness, and evil desires. Show your children the folly of being entertained by sinful sexual jokes and innuendos while professing Christianity. "Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Col. 3:6).

***Our Third Character Is Known Merely As The Rich Man, A Man Whose Skill Was Business (Luke 16:1-13).***

I'm making an assumption here about where he got his money, but likely a valid one. Good business skills are valuable. There's a thrill to business in the free enterprise system. Start with an idea. Invest, work, and produce. That isn't wrong and in fact, the church itself is compared to a merchant/businessman who bought and sold pearls. When he found the best, he liquidated and bought it. That's where the parable ends because that's the point Jesus wanted to make. But, if the story had progressed, you might see that the man probably hoped to sell it for a profit. That's not wrong (Mat. 13:45-46). Yet there's a wrong way to engage in business and



obtain wealth.

There was a lesson in business in that same context; a lesson in which Jesus employed sarcasm. We need to hear it from Him today. Teach it to your children before they go into business. It was a story of a ruthless employee who was discovered and fired. Because he was too proud to dig ditches or beg he took it upon himself to revisit his former customers and negotiated new deals, presumably to benefit himself. Then Jesus said,

So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. (Luke 16:8-9)

This statement is so contrary to what Jesus taught on other occasions that there can be only one reasonable explanation for this teaching: He was using sarcasm to drive the point home.

Good parents encourage their children to learn business basics. What are Christ's values to teach alongside this skill?

- “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mat. 16:26).
- “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”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (Jam. 4:13-14).

- “He who swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Psa. 15:4).
- “Provide things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17).

***Our Fourth Example Is Lot’s Daughters, Who Displayed Social Skills***

At some point, we’ve all followed Lot’s digression. He chose the plain of Jordan which connected to Sodom (Gen. 13:10), he pitched his tent on the outskirts (Gen. 13:12-13), he sat at the gate of Sodom (Gen. 19:1), and he reared his children there (Gen. 19:12-14). Lot’s daughters were attached to the people of Sodom. These young women were reared in Sodom and had adopted wickedness. Lot is called a righteous man (2 Pet. 2:7), so we don’t believe they learned their wickedness from him. They got it from culture; a culture in which they had assimilated well. We know little (they were raised by Lot in Sodom, and stayed until Sodom was destroyed), but we can make obvious observations. They went to Sodom High and got a scholarship to Gomorrah U. Their decision was based on attachments they had made in that society. They courted and married husbands and they were happy there; all implying that they felt well-liked by that town. They “fit in.”

Christians are naturally social people because Jesus trained us to be; but social standing should never mean compromise. Paul was all things to all people in order to save some (1 Cor. 9:22), but lived faithfully (Acts 26:29). Further, our motivation to fit in is never for mere selfish reasons, but rather because we want to influence people for Christ.

Now consider Christ’s values--the ones parents should teach along with social skills: His people must be kind to others, but not at the cost of hurting the Lord. We must be friendly without compromising morals (1 Cor. 6:9), or

participating in gossip, or in behavior which tears others down. We must not insult our God by using His name in vain, and we refuse to abuse the weak when it is popular to do so (Phi. 2:4). We will not drink, cheat, or harm our parents.

***Number Five Is Korah, Who Knew How To Lead People***

Are leaders made or born? The answer has to be that some inborn traits of extraversion are helpful, but along with that, leaders are made. I think most people are pleased if their children become leaders. Most parents try to create leadership skills in their children.

Korah was a leader (Num. 16). He brought a petition of sorts to Moses and Aaron, and with him, two hundred fifty respected men in Israel. He asserted that the criteria for being in the leadership position Moses possessed was holiness, and that they were as holy as he was, and thus, should also be in positions of highest leadership (Num. 16:2-3). In truth, God had selected Moses, and had not selected them. That should have settled the matter. Korah wouldn't relent though, and his followers stuck with him until the bitter end. God destroyed them all in the view of all Israel (Num. 16:30-35).

What are the values of Jesus to teach your children along with this skill? Never separate your leadership from your Christianity. "I have hidden your word in my heart so I might not sin against you" (Psa. 119:11; Mat. 6:33). Always remember that as you lead, you must also follow. Slave owners were told in Ephesians 6:9 to remember that they, too, had a master—in heaven. Teach them to never exploit or harm people for self-advancement (Phi. 2:4). Finally, teach them to lead as servants (Mark 10:43-45).

***The Final Character Is Cain, Who Was Good At Religion***

What we know about Cain's religion is little. We know that his brother offered a bloody sacrifice, while he

offered a vegetable sacrifice. We know God had adequately communicated to Cain what would please Him (Gen. 4:7). We know that his worship was called wicked by God (1 John 3:12). Adam and Eve taught Cain and Abel to worship. I suppose you could say he was skilled at it, and he did offer it to the right God. I can't tell you how many parents have commented to me about their apostate adult children, "When he was fourteen he made talks in church." What if we teach them how to be skilled in religion, but fail to teach Christ's values for worship? All parents should note three things that all children must learn to please God in religion. They are these: (1) the New Testament presents a pattern for our worship (Rom. 6:17-18, Jude 3), (2) worship must be in truth (i.e., according to what God's word authorizes, John 4:24); and (3) worship isn't designed primarily to please us.

If your children grow into adulthood without grasping the coming of the great last day, you've failed them.

I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they had that and I had not given them a single shilling, they would have been rich; and if they had not that, and I had given them all the world, they would be poor indeed. (Henry)

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## The Parable Of The Virgins

*Mike Benson*



Mike Benson is married to the former Lanore Claiborne. Together they have two daughters: Bethany (married to Adam Noles) and Katie (married to Josh Deck). They also have one granddaughter, Evelyn. Mike graduated from Freed-Hardeman University in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in Biblical Studies. Currently, Mike serves as the evangelist for the Oxford congregation in Oxford, Alabama. He also leads a weekly devotional on Facebook called *Skylight*.

Jesus attended weddings (John 2:1-11) and He talked about weddings (Mat. 22:1-13). In the study which has been assigned, our Lord taught a parable using a first-century Jewish wedding as His backdrop. Ironically, we know very little today about the actual wedding ceremonies during Jesus' time.

Our interpretation is handicapped by the fact that we do not have complete information about wedding customs in first-century Palestine. Nobody seems to have thought it worthwhile to set down in detail what was normally done; after all, why should anyone do this? Everyone knew what happened in a wedding. So we are left with stories like this present one, which tells us of things that were done and leave us to guess at others. (Morris 620)

Much of what we *think* we know about first-century Jewish wedding proceedings is often colored and influenced

by the practices and cultural traditions which we are familiar with today. For instance:

1. We tend to place a high premium on starting on time, while first-century Jewish weddings were much less formal in regards to the exact moment such occasions began (Mat. 5:25).
2. Our modern-day weddings last a relatively short time, while first-century wedding festivities usually lasted for days (Morris 620-621).
3. We can't image excluding members of the wedding party from the event itself, but ancient wedding participants understood that they could actually be prohibited from the gala (Mat. 25:11-12).
4. We often begin our weddings today with a song, while ancient nuptials often began with a shout (Mat. 25:6).
5. We are accustomed to watching a bride being escorted down the aisle by her father to meet the groom, while our ancient Jewish counterparts were used to watching the wedding party make its way from the home of the bride's parents to the home of the groom.
6. None of our marriages are arranged by our parents today, at least not in America, while the majority of first-century Jewish marriages were pre-determined by the parents of the bride and bridegroom long before the event transpired.
7. Today's bride often brings her meager belongings to the new union, while brides of the first century often brought a substantial dowry to the marriage (Luke 15:8).

This is obviously not an exhaustive list of the differences between twenty-first and first-century weddings, but it does illustrate how that we might be tempted to allow our experiences and backgrounds to potentially impact and

influence our interpretation of the Scriptures, especially regarding wedding services.

We do know that Jewish weddings were preceded by a betrothal that was much more binding than an engagement in America today (Mat. 1:27; Luke 1:27; Luke 2:5; 2 Cor. 11:2). In point of fact, the betrothal was the first stage of a union and required divorce proceedings to dissolve it (Deu. 22:13-29; Deu. 24:1-4; Mat. 1:19). At the conclusion of the one-to-two-year espousal period, the marriage ceremony took place—typically on a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin and on a Thursday if she was a widow (Morris 621).

In this particular parable, Jesus did not address the wedding celebration, the banquet, the guests, or father of the groom as He did only three chapters earlier. Instead, He focused on virgin bridesmaids and a bridegroom—all of whom were integral parts of an ancient wedding procession. Jesus began the story by saying the kingdom of heaven is like ten girls who were waiting for the bridegroom's arrival. "The original word translated kingdom has the primary definition of 'rule,' 'reign,' or 'dominion.' The parables illustrate the kingdom of God, that is, His rule for our lives" (Wharton 344). Note: this is the last time the expression "kingdom of heaven" is found in Matthew's account.

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was *heard*: "Behold, the

bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!” Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, “Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” But the wise answered, saying, “*No*, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.” And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” But he answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.” Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. (NKJV, Mat. 25:1-13)

The purpose of this study is twofold:

1. To examine the parable, including what limited information we have about the various Jewish wedding participants and customs, in order to help us correctly interpret the text.
2. To make application of these important Bible truths and observe how they are to, in fact, reign and rule in our hearts in light of our Bridegroom’s inevitable appearance.

With these introductory remarks concluded, note the following.

1. **The Bridegroom Delayed** (Mat. 25:5)

At some point after sundown, the bridegroom would leave his parent’s home in the company of his closest friends.



The group would then begin to make its way to the home of the bride. Once the bridegroom and his entourage met up with the bride and her bridesmaids, the actual wedding ceremony would take place. Following that solemn occasion, the entire wedding party would begin its procession to the home of the bridegroom where the lengthy wedding banquet would commence.

Scholars suggest that it was the bridegroom's custom to *purposely* delay his meeting with the bride and her attendants.

The wedding of a young Jewish couple typically took place on the third day of the week to allow ample time after for the weekly Sabbath for preparation. After a full day of celebration with guests at the home of the bride's parents, nightfall brought the expectation of the next stage of the festivities...**The custom was to deliberately delay his arrival, as he bargained for the gifts he prepared to give to his future in-laws.** To arrive too early might express a lack of respect for her family. It was customary to express respect for her parents' reluctance to give their daughter away. By waiting until the last minute, she was able to remain in her parent's home a little longer before being given in marriage. (Wallace 144, emphasis added)

In any case, Jesus did not reveal the reason for the bridegroom's delay in the parable. His audience would have been well acquainted with the customs of the day and so any

explanation would have been unnecessary. “A wedding was an important occasion. Everything else would be set aside for it. And since nobody expected punctuality, no great attention would be paid to getting through the preliminaries smartly. The bridegroom was in no great hurry...” (Morris 622).

### **Lesson #1**

We know that Jesus is the Bridegroom (Mat. 9:14-15; Eph. 5:23, 27) and that He *is* coming; we just don't know *when* that occasion will be. The fact of the bridegroom's delay serves to reinforce the idea that the time of His coming for His bride will be unpredictable and unexpected (Luke 9:26; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:10-11; Col. 3:4; 1 The. 4:16-17; 1 The. 5:22-23; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jam. 5:7; 2 Pet. 3:10; 1 John 3:2-3; Rev. 1:7).

Four times in the chapter just previous to the parable of the ten virgins Jesus emphasized the fact that the time of His coming was uncertain (Mat. 24:36, 42, 44, 50). In view of the repetitive clarity with which Scripture lays stress on this point, how is it that end-time prophets have the audacity to tell us otherwise?

Church history is full of stories about date setters and their cults who, thinking they had figured out a specific time frame for the Second Coming, quit their jobs, sold off their assets, and moved to a mountaintop or desert somewhere to await the sound of the last trumpet. The past few decades especially have seen an upsurge in self-styled prophets and amateur numerologists who have been certain they have the date and chronology of the end times all figured out. All of them have

been disappointed, discredited, disillusioned, or otherwise brought to disrepute—and deservedly so. (MacArthur, *Parables* 129)

Jesus settled the discussion in the last verse of the parable. He said, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Mat. 25:13).

## 2. **The Bridesmaids *Displayed*** (Mat. 25:1)

Jewish wedding activities were often held after the sun had gone down and that necessitated the use of lamps or torches (O’Donnell 728).

Traditionally this has been understood as “lamps” (which may be what the word means in Acts 20:8), but against this is the fact that λαμπας means “torch.” Carr says that this is “the only meaning that the word bears in Greek literature early or late); the word for “lamp” is λυχνος (5:15 etc.), while “lantern” is φανος. We should also bear in mind that ordinary lamps gave inadequate light for an outdoor procession, that they would be easily blown out in even a light breeze, and that they would hold enough oil for hours of burning. J. Jeremias cites evidence that in modern times in wedding processions in Palestine light is given by “long sticks, around the tops of which are wrapped rags completely soaked with olive oil” (J. McDowell Richards, ed., *Soli Deo Gloria* [Richmond, 1968], p. 84). It seems likely that this was

the custom in antiquity and that we should understand the term in this way here. Lightfoot cites a passage from R. Solomon referring to “Ismaelite” weddings where the bride is preceded by “about ten wooden staves, having each of them on the top a vessel like a dish, in which there is a piece of cloth and with oil and pitch: these, being lighted, they carry before her for torches.” (Morris 620)

The torches not only gave necessary light for wedding procession, but they also made a **spectacular nighttime display** to announce and help celebrate the new union. Thus, the ten bridesmaids had the responsibility of lighting the way for the wedding party as it weaved through the local community to the bridegroom’s house for the banquet.

Jesus divided the ten bridesmaids into two groups of five (Mat 25:2). He characterized the first five as wise or prudent. They took oil in flasks along with their torches and were prepared in the likely event the bridegroom tarried. They understood that there was no way to know when the bridegroom would make his appearance and that they might have to wait for some time.

The Lord described the other five bridesmaids as “foolish.” The Greek word translated here as “foolish” is *moros*, from which we get our English word “moron.” All ten of the bridesmaids had torches, and to that extent were prepared, but the five foolish took no oil with them as wisdom and sensibility dictated.

Jeremias points out it was necessary to pour oil on the rags at the end of the torches to get them to burn brightly, but these girls had not

bothered to bring the necessary oil. He says, “their negligence can no longer be judged as lack of foresight excusable by the unexpectedly long delay of the bridegroom. It must be judged as inexcusable, punishable carelessness.” The rags would have been oily to start with, but in a society where people set little store on punctuality and where preparations for a wedding were extensive and time-consuming this might well not be enough. It was foolish to think that the amount of oil the rags in a torch could hold would be sufficient. (Morris 622)

All was ready except for the five foolish bridesmaids who had left the premises to try to buy more oil. Their absence was an understandable annoyance to the bridegroom. It was inexcusably thoughtless of them not to bring oil in the first place. **Keeping a burning lamp was their one duty.** Their irresponsibility was similar to (maybe even worse than) the negligence of the man in Matthew 22:11-14 who showed up at a royal wedding without being dressed for such an occasion. It was a thoughtless insult to the bridegroom. (MacArthur, *Parables* 132, emphasis added)

Ladies, imagine that one of your bridesmaids was careless and forgot to bring her dress to your wedding. She would obviously draw undue attention by virtue of the fact that her attire didn't conform with the other wedding escorts.

Every eye would be drawn not to you—the bride—but to the one thoughtless bridesmaid and her mismatched vestments. Every wedding photograph would point to her obvious failure and sad inattention. Maybe she would still be permitted to stand in and with the wedding party, but her thoughtlessness would never be forgotten. And each time you turned through your wedding album you would be immediately reminded that she had let you down. In our modern American culture, the bride is the center of attention, but in the male-dominated culture of ancient Palestine, the bridegroom was the center of attention—and he would not overlook the obvious failure of the five foolish virgins. They had had an essential and important role in the festivities of the evening, but had bungled their one duty as light-bearers and had caused a disruption in the celebration.

Jesus said that all ten of the bridesmaids slept while the bridegroom tarried. It's interesting to note that the Lord did not censure any of the girls for their slumber. The bridegroom was in a matter of speaking, "running late," and so they essentially took a power nap. "Jesus speaks no word of blame for the sleepers. In the circumstances to sleep was a good idea. All their preparations had been made, and from the time the bridegroom made his appearance they would be kept busy for a long time. To sleep while they could was an opportunity not to be missed" (Morris 622). The essence of the problem for the five foolish bridesmaids had nothing to do with a physical sleep; it had everything to do with an inexcusable mental lapse.

### **Lesson #2**

We know that Jesus is the Bridegroom and that He *is* coming; we just don't know when that occasion will be. Considering these two facts, we must always be alert and ready for that day (Luke 12:35-38; Mark 13:33-37; Luke

12:39-40; Mat. 24:42-44; 1 The. 5:1ff; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 The. 5:6; Acts 20:31; 1 Pet. 5:8).

When Dwight Eisenhower was president, on one occasion he vacationed in Denver, Colorado. There was in Denver a six-year-old boy who had incurable cancer. The boy had expressed the wish that he might see the president. President Eisenhower heard the little boy's wish and on a Sunday morning he visited him. The presidential limousine pulled up in front of the house. He walked up to the front door and knocked. The father, in blue jeans and an old shirt with a day's growth of beard, opened the door. When he saw the president he was speechless. The president took the six-year-old boy out to see the limousine and talked with him for a while. Then he shook his hand and left. Afterward, when the father would recount the story, he would say, "And just to think, there I stood with my blue jeans, my old shirt, and a day's growth of beard. What a way to meet the president." (Trivette)

Beloved, are you ready for the Bridegroom's coming?

### 3. **The Bridegroom's Arrival *Conveyed*** (Mat. 25:6-9)

An announcement went out that the bridegroom was on his way. He had not actually arrived as of yet, but he had been sighted and so a cry went out in harmony with the custom of the day. The shout awakened the sleeping bridesmaids and prompted each of them to action. Their

torches had grown dim during their nap and so they each worked to rekindle them. That meant applying more oil on the rags in order to ensure that the flames burnt steadily and brightly.

Now the difference between the two groups begins to appear. It is not necessary to hold that the torches were kept burning during the time the girls were sleeping. A torch would hold only a small amount of oil, and it could be consumed between the time of the shout and the arrival of the bridegroom. The foolish girls now found themselves in trouble, for their torches were going out (the present tense indicates that the torches were even then going out; it was not a matter of “our torches will soon go out”; they were going out right then). There would be no place in a torchlight procession for girls whose torches gave no light. But there was no immediate panic because there were other girls there who had oil. So they asked them to give them some of their oil. To the careless girls that must have seemed the obvious solution. (Morris 623)

The wise bridesmaids were unwilling to share their supply of oil. While they had brought a sufficient amount of oil for their own torches, they weren't convinced there was enough for themselves as well as the foolish five. Despite the late hour, they encouraged their counterparts to go to the sellers and secure oil for themselves. The foolish girls went out to make their purchases, but there was a problem. In



ancient times merchants closed their shops at sundown and did not reopen until daylight. It was evidently possible to purchase oil at this very late hour, but that no doubt meant waking the seller, getting him to reopen his shop, making the purchase and then hurrying back to meet the bridegroom. All of this activity would have taken precious time.

### Lesson #3

We know that Jesus is the Bridegroom and that He *is* coming; we just don't when that occasion will be. Considering these two facts, we must always be alert and ready for that day—and readiness on our part involves an honest admission that we cannot borrow from our peers what the Lord requires from us as individuals.

How many times have we heard it said, “My loved one was a faithful member of the church”? While it is appropriate to commemorate the devotion of our departed loved ones, it is *impossible* to participate in the wedding banquet of heaven based upon the preparation of our loved ones or friends.

A great man died the other day. He had lived long and well. Through the years he had plated his roots deep in the soil of proper conduct. He had become a veritable more force for right. What a pity that his strength of will and his love of goodness could not be transferred to those who were at his bedside. But character cannot be bequeathed. Obedience to God is another that cannot be borrowed. Here each one is accountable individually. The husband cannot stand for the wife, nor the wife for the husband. All the faith and dedication in

the world of parents is not enough for the children; and all the hope and enthusiasm of a boy or girl cannot suffice for an indifferent father or mother. The plain truth is that God expects personal obedience to His commands because He holds every man personally accountable for what he does. (Lightfoot 168-169)

Paul said, “Who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath” (Rom. 2:6-8). “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

#### **4. The Bridesmaids *Distained*** (Mat 25:11-12)

By the time the five foolish bridesmaids made it back to the bride’s home, they had missed the arrival of the bridegroom and the wedding procession had made its way to his house. The girls made their way to the place where the feast was being held and asked to be admitted, but to their dismay, the bridegroom refused to let them in.

He says nothing about what happened when the bridegroom arrived, nor about the procession for which the torches were required. His hearers were well enough versed in what went on at weddings to understand this for themselves. He goes

immediately to the time when the girls who were ready went into him to the wedding. Their forethought was justified, they had the oil they needed, and they took their appointed place in the wedding festivities. That the door was shut indicates that at this wedding feast, at any rate, there was a time to join the festivities and those who were not there when the time expired were totally excluded. (Morris 624)

Not surprisingly, the foolish bridesmaids pleaded with the bridegroom to open the door and let them in. They cried, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” “They have no lack of desire to be numbered among the guests. And they are there on the spot. Presumably they had been invited earlier and they are sure that there must be a place for them” (Morris 625). But rather than opening the door as they requested, the bridegroom’s words made it clear that they would not be enjoying the celebration. “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.”

“I don’t know you” is devastating. They had been expecting to be on center stage with their torches in the procession. But their failure to be ready when the time came meant that they were excluded finally. If we reason that no bridegroom would say that he did not know some of the invited guests, we miss the sting in the story. Jesus is not telling a story about something that actually happened; he was warning people of the dreadful fate of those who know that they should be watching for the coming of the Son of man

but who do not do this. Thereby they exclude themselves among the saved. While there was time they shut themselves out. There is no way by which they can now come in. (Morris 625)

#### Lesson #4

We know that Jesus is the Bridegroom and that He *is* coming; we just don't know when that occasion will be. Considering these two facts, we must always be alert and ready for that day—and readiness on our part involves an honest admission that we cannot borrow from our peers what the Lord requires from us as individuals. We cannot neglect preparation and then expect the Lord to welcome us to the feast (Mat. 7:21-23). “Once Jesus returns, it will be too late to rethink your life and your priorities. **His judgment will be irreversible**, and there will be no second chance to repent” (Platt 327).

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# Revelation 20 Explained: What About The Thousand-Year Reign?

*Jody Apple*



Jody Apple serves as the principal speaker for the International Gospel Hour. Preaching full time since 1978, he has served churches in Puerto Rico, Tennessee, and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he worked for twenty-five years. He travels extensively to speak at lectures and meetings as well as to promote the work of IGH. He and his wife, Evelyn (Hobbs), live in the greater Atlanta area. They have three children: Jonathan (and Hayli), Benjamin, and Julia.

## Introduction

In order to explain the nature and import of the “thousand-year reign” in Revelation 20 this article will address key issues in the interpretive methods used to explain the meaning of the phrase “thousand years” in that text. It will do so first, by introducing the various original terms pertinent to the discussion. Second, it will make use of two articles, one written by Dave Mathewson and the other by Vern Sheridan Poythress, that will present a four-level method of communication model recommended for the interpretation of highly symbolic texts and then employ that model in explaining Revelation 20. And third, we will note some key observations from the text itself that are consistent with the key terms and the four-level method of communication model.

## The Use Of “Thousand” In The New Testament

Chilio (χίλιοι), one of the terms rendered as some form of “thousand” in the New Testament, appears in eight different forms, sixty-nine times in fifty-eight verses.

Combined with numerical prefixes for two, three, four, five, and seven it appears, appropriately as the numbers two thousand (once, the approximate number of drowned swine, Mark 5:13); seven thousand (once, referring to the number who had not bowed to Baal, Rom. 11:4); five thousand (six times, always referring to the number of the multitude that Jesus fed, Mat. 14:21; Mat. 16:9; Mark 6:44; Mark 8:19; Luke 9:14; John 6:10); four thousand (five times, the first four referring to a multitude that Jesus fed—Mat. 15:38; Mat. 16:10; Mark 8:9, 20—and the last Acts 21:38, referring to the number of assassins who, with “the Egyptian” had “stirred up a rebellion”); and three thousand (once, identifying the estimated number of those who were baptized on Pentecost, Acts 2:41) (NKJV).

The term also appears in combination with ἄρχω twenty-one times in the text, usually translated as “officer,” “high officer,” “captain,” or “commander” (e.g., Mark 6:21; John 18:12; and most frequently in Acts 21-25, e.g., Acts 21:31-33; Acts 21:37; et al.).

It appears twenty-three times throughout the text as χιλιάς, referring to a group of some multiple of a thousand, as in “ten thousand” and “twenty thousand” (Luke 14:31), “five thousand” (Acts 4:4), and “twenty-three thousand” (1 Cor. 10:8). The difference between these twenty-three occurrences and the initial occurrences cited: the quantity of the “thousands” appears as a separate term (or terms), where the first examples cited earlier were compound terms that included roots with their adjoined prefixes. Most of these twenty-three occurrences appear in the text of Revelation. We see it twice in Revelation 5:11 as “thousands of thousands,” once in Revelation 7:4 referring to the one hundred forty-four thousand, twelve times in Revelation 7:5-8 as it applies to each of the twelve tribes listed, once in 11:13 referring to the



seven thousand killed in the earth quake, two more times in 14:1 and 14:3 in reference to the one hundred forty-four thousand, and then, finally, in 21:16 as the measurement of the four-square city, twelve thousand furlongs.

And, finally, the term appears in a different form, χίλιοι, as the English word “thousand” eleven times in ten verses. We see it twice in 2 Peter 3:8 and then nine times in nine verses in Revelation. In Revelation 11:3, referring to the two witnesses who would prophesy, the text says that they prophesied for one thousand, two hundred sixty days. The same number of days appears again in 12:6, this time as it applies to the length of time that the woman fled into the wilderness and was providentially sustained. In Revelation 14:20, the abundance of blood from the winepress of God’s wrath reached a depth up to the horses’ bridles and extended for one thousand, six hundred furlongs. The last of these eleven occurrences are the six we encounter, once each, in the verses from Revelation 20:2-7. Of even more specific interest, each of these six occurrences uses the term with reference to a singular, not a multiple, span of one thousand, and that with reference to the time span of “years,” not days. The only other text in the New Testament to use the term “thousand” with reference to “years” is 2 Peter 3:8, where we see it twice: “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.” That passage apparently parallels the Old Testament text of Psalm 90:4: “For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night.”

At least one other term worthy of note needs to be mentioned, though it does not have any real bearing on our discussion, we note it only to be thorough. In twelve instances some form of the term μυρίος appears in the New Testament, a term we see in our English “myriad.” It translates as “ten

thousand” or, with prefix, “twenty thousand,” and sometimes as “myriad,” “countless thousands,” “innumerable,” etc. We see it in “ten thousand” (Mat. 18:24), in “innumerable multitude” (Luke 12:1), in “fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19), “myriads of Jews” (Acts 21:20), as “ten thousand” (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Cor. 14:19; Jude 14), in “innumerable company” (Heb. 12:22), and finally, twice each in Revelation 5:11 and Revelation 9:16. In Revelation 5:11 it appears twice in the words “ten thousand times ten thousand.” It appears twice again (one with prefix) in Revelation 9:16 as “two hundred million.” Again, though it does not have any direct bearing on the meaning of the passages in Revelation 20 rendered as “thousand years,” these references will be part of a thorough search and discussion of the term “thousand.”

Our particular interests lie in those New Testament texts and contexts that not only use the term “thousand,” but also apply it to time, as opposed to the number of things, people, and distances. That restricts our interest to 2 Peter 3:8, Revelation 11:3, Revelation 12:6, and the six occurrences in the text of Revelation 20:2-7. Narrowing it even further, we rule out the importance of Revelation 11:3 and Revelation 12:6, not because they do not refer to time, but because they refer to, in one sense, a totally different dimension of time. The one thousand, two hundred sixty days in those two passages, paralleling forty-two months and the expression “time, times, and a half of time” (cf. Dan. 7:25; Dan. 12:7) refer symbolically to a distinctly limited slice of time that differs dramatically from the “thousand-years passages” in 2 Peter and Revelation 20. The latter texts focus on the expression thousand years—*χίλια ἔτη*—rather than days. The use of the term thousand—ten raised to the third level, or ten times ten times ten—as it applies to years, not days, signifies a much larger, yet still distinct, slice of time. That

larger, yet still distinct slice of time, as we will observe, has caused considerable interpretive gymnastics in the religious world.

The particular theology that finds alleged root in Revelation 20 has been appropriately called, based on the original term, chiliasm. In our day it appears more popularly known as millenarianism, even more so millennialism, coming to us from the Latin term for thousand, “mill(e).”

The words—actually the interpretation of the words—“thousand years” or millennium, have given rise to three distinct theological time tables, all dealing with both the duration (in each case one thousand years) and the timing or placement of those one thousand years, into a specific historical (allegedly, anyway) spot. Those three schools are known as premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism. The first places the thousand years as a literal time frame that will occur in the future, with Christ’s return occurring prior to—hence **pre**millennialism—the thousand years. The second places the return of Christ after the, yet future, thousand years—hence **post**millennialism. And the third places—better, interprets—the thousand years to be a symbolic description of our current time in history.

### **Mathewson’s Re-examination Of The Millennium In Revelation 20**

To aid in our study of the “thousand years” we will refer to two articles from the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. The first, Dave Mathewson’s article “A Re-examination of the Millennium In Rev. 20:1-6: Consummation and Recapitulation,” appeared in June 2001. The second, Vern Sheridan Poythress’ article “Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev. 20:1-6,” appeared in March 1993.

We start with Mathewson’s article, segueing early on into a summation of Poythress, then returning to Mathewson.

The reason we take this approach will be apparent as we proceed.

Mathewson introduces his article by stating his purpose:

The purpose of this article is to re-examine the question of the millennial kingdom as articulated in Rev. 20:1-6. More specifically, this article will consider the meaning and function of 20:1-6 within Revelation as it relates to the contemporary debate about whether this section is best understood within a premillennial or amillennial framework. (237)

There are two primary issues that Mathewson addresses: first, “how literally the reference to the one thousand years in 20:1-6 should be taken,” and second, where we fit this thousand-year block of time—whether figurative or literal—chronologically (237).

Mathewson’s primary method in explaining his understanding of Revelation 20:1-6 focuses on the relationship between that text and Revelation 19:11-21. His take: the latter text “recapitulates 19:11-21” (Mathewson 238). The bulk of his article addresses that “recapitulation” theme and, while significant in its details, we focus here instead on a larger scale methodology that he discusses concerning the interpretation of Revelation as a whole and the meaning of the thousand-year reign in particular.

In the first major section after his introduction, Mathewson begins to build a case for his Revelation 19:11-21 and Revelation 20:1-10 recapitulation thesis, but not before introducing some basic principles “about the communicative nature of Revelation” (238). As he starts this section he

introduces G.K. Beale's use of Poythress:

Before considering the relationship between Rev. 19:11-21 and 20:1-10, it is necessary to say something about the communicative nature of Revelation. There now appears to be a consensus that Revelation communicates at a symbolic level and therefore should be interpreted symbolically (see Rev. 1:1). Following V. S. Poythress, G. K. Beale distinguishes three levels of communication in Revelation: (1) the visionary level, which consists of what John actually saw in his visionary experience (beasts, locusts, bride, etc.); (2) the referential level, which consists of what John's symbols represented or to what events and persons they make reference; (3) the symbolic level, which consists of what the symbols connote about the realities to which they refer. (238)

In the footnote at the end of the above citation, Mathewson notes that Beale "slightly modifies the suggestions of Poythress." Beale summarizes Poythress' thoughts about the "communicative nature of Revelation" in three steps, whereas Poythress used four. Based on Beale's three-point summarization, Mathewson draws two implications about communication in the Apocalypse. First, allowing multiple levels of communication, an interpreter must be careful not to "rule in favor of one millennial approach to this text over another" (Mathewson 238). He expands that thought:

In other words, the reader cannot simply collapse the visionary—(1) above—and the referential—(2) above—levels and conclude that the one thousand years must refer to a literal, or a specific, future period of time. Conceivably, at the symbolic level the one thousand year period envisioned in Rev. 20:1-6 could refer to a period of any duration, past, present, or future. (Mathewson 238)

Mathewson's second implication or caution: interpreters of Revelation 19:11-20:15 must be careful not to confuse John's visions with "the actual temporal sequence of the events envisioned" (238). He hastens to note that the correlation between visionary and actual historical sequences are not to be wholly disregarded, but that it's easy to see how an interpreter might "glibly assume(s) a one-to-one correspondence between visionary sequence and temporal sequence" (239).

### **Poythress' Four Levels of Communication**

At this point Mathewson continues to build his recapitulation motif between the accounts in Revelation 19 and Revelation 20. While germane to his discussion, we take this opportunity to shift our attention to an overview of the four levels of communication that Poythress develops in his article "Genre And Hermeneutics In Rev. 20:1-6." As his title reflects, his interest lies not only with showing that various levels of communication exist, but that understanding and properly applying how those levels come into play in any text, especially the apocalyptic language in Revelation, dramatically affects the conclusions that we draw. His specific interest, again, as the title states, centers on how

those four distinct communicative levels affect our understanding of the opening verses of Revelation 20:1-6. That passage, going through verse seven as we have noted, contains six specific references to a “thousand years.” The text serves as the genesis of most millennial interpretations. Poythress’ concern: skipping one, or conflating more than one, of the levels of communication dramatically impacts an interpreter’s understanding and explanation of the meaning and application of the millennium. Even more startling, doing so risks egregious theological errors.

To illustrate exactly how symbolic language functions in the interpretation of key texts in Revelation, Poythress starts with, and develops at length, how “we can distinguish at least four relevant levels of communication” (41). He develops these levels against the backdrop of Revelation 13:1-8 first and then, after explaining and applying them in what might be best described as “test case,” shows how they can be applied in one other “test case” before moving to consider and apply them in Revelation 20:1-6.

Here, in edited form, are the “four relevant levels of communication” that Poythress advances using Revelation 13 and the imagery of the beast as the starting point:

1. The linguistic level, consisting of the textual record itself...
2. The visionary level, consisting of the visual experience that John had in seeing the beast...
3. The referential level, consisting of the historical reference of the beast and of the various particulars in the description. The beast stands for or symbolizes something that appears in history...My main point is that all interpreters alike find some form of historical reference for the beast. Such historical reference constitutes the third level of communication.

4. A symbolical level, consisting of the interpretation of what the symbolic imagery actually connotes about its historical referent. Revelation 13:1-8 does not merely assert that something will occur in history. The symbolic clothing of the communication conveys something about the characteristics of the historical referent... (41-42) [The ellipses in this citation indicate the place where Poythress provided additional explanation].

As Poythress develops his understanding of Revelation 13, he notes that the nature of this text “employs symbolism in a way not characteristic of ordinary historical narrative. In Revelation 13 symbolism is primary, whereas in historical narrative literal description is primary” (42). Each genre of the Biblical text reveals truth, but they do so in different ways. Mark’s account of the healing of a paralytic was literal, not symbolic, but the healing itself reveals “symbolic, theological connections with the purpose of Jesus to forgive sins” (42). His point: “historical narratives in the Bible contain both a direct relation to the underlying events and an indirect indication of the theological significance of the events” (Poythress 42). But not so with reference to the symbolism employed in Revelation. In fact, Poythress notes:

In Revelation 13 the relation is reversed. The symbolism dominates in such a way that the passage expresses directly the theological significance and only indirectly points to the underlying event. The imagery used in describing the beast is precisely that: imagery. Imagery captures the symbolic and theological significance directly, but we must make a transition to another sphere in order to find the referent.



The challenges associated with the transition are what give rise to the differences among schools of interpretation. (42)

Poythress, moving toward the application of these four levels in Revelation 20, states an obvious matter: “If multiple levels exist at one point in Revelation—namely, the beast—might they also exist at other points?” (43). His concern: that “differences among schools of interpretation” are grounded in differing approaches to Biblical communication theory, which differences are magnified when more difficult, especially highly symbolic, texts are analyzed and explicated. What archetypes we start with determine the exegesis and connotations with which we end.

Before moving to Revelation 20, Poythress provides another extended “test case” to show how multiple levels of communication come into play in “a more controversial passage like Rev. 11:1-13” (43). We will not take the time to explore that discussion, but mention it first to note that Poythress provides additional support and weight to his claim, and second not to overlook this example’s significant contribution to his thesis.

Poythress opens the third major section of his article, entitled “Symbolic Significance In Rev. 20:1-6,” with the following paragraph:

How do our observations apply to Rev. 20:1-6? Once again, we may expect the presence of four distinct levels. The linguistic level consists of the text of 20:1-6. The visionary level consists of John’s actual visions of a descending angel, a dragon, a pit, the seizing of the dragon, the

sealing of the pit, the thrones, and so on. The referential level consists of the historical referents of the dragon, the pit, the thousand years, and the first resurrection. The symbolic level consists of the symbolic significances of the various figures and events depicted. (45-46)

The importance of each level, especially the order in which Poythress presents them, cannot be overstated. It can be extremely tempting to draw conclusions that should only be drawn after working through all four levels, starting hopefully at the earliest linguistic text level. In teaching introductory hermeneutics counsel must be given to prevent students from jumping to the meaning and application of a text before even evaluating what the text, even on the very surface, states. That very basic observational level, or as Poythress styles it, “the linguistic level,” gives rise to the second through fourth stages. True, some strictly historical or narrative texts do not always dictate the need for the second or “visionary” stage, but Poythress’ suggested four-level approach has in mind the distinct symbolic style that we find in the Apocalypse. That genre of literature necessitates extra levels of care in elucidation.

At this point Poythress suggests why certain viewpoints deviate not just from his prescribed stages, but from key aspects of the text that demand conclusions at variance from his four-level interpretive paradigm. He does so with Revelation 20’s premillennial interpretive schemes in mind.

Many premillennialists, I suggest, neglect the possibility of the presence of a visionary and a symbolic level. Instead they move almost immediately from the

linguistic level to the referential level. The language of “living” and “first resurrection” is understood in a literal sense. Anastasis (“resurrection”) elsewhere in the NT is always used of bodily resurrection. And, it is claimed, the context of Revelation 20 does not point away from this normal understanding. Hence “resurrection” must here mean bodily resurrection. Hence the first resurrection refers to the bodily resurrection of believers at the second coming. (Poythress 46)

If, as Poythress proposes, some millennial theories have short-circuited the interpretive process by omitting or fusing key levels of communication, they can misrepresent the intent of the text. In the central discourse he discusses, Revelation 20:1-6, he delineates between the specific visionary and referential levels in John’s vision. John saw resurrected saints now reigning. That’s not interpretation. In context, that’s what John’s vision literally reveals. For John to record what the Lord wanted him to write—“What you see, write...” (Rev. 1:11)—John had to see it first. He wrote it down next. That written text comprises the linguistic element, the first level of communication. When we read that text, we read what John saw. That’s our connection with John’s vision, the second level of communication. But before we can explain what that vision refers to for us, we must understand what God intended it to refer to, historically, for John, for the first readers, and only after that, how that reference connects to us. The linguistic level records a vision that has a connected, or intended, reference. In most genres the task might be complete by now, but in apocalyptic literature, we must also consider what the symbolic references that we

encounter through the first three levels connote. Now, hopefully, we are better prepared to understand what the passage signifies.

With reference to the reign of the resurrected saints for example, Poythress traces the steps. First, John saw the bodies of dead saints come back to life. That's what he wrote. But there's more. Though the vision accounts for the resurrection of saints and their resultant reign, what does it symbolize? Poythress says: "On the symbolic level the text pictures new life and vindication" (46). But what about the final, the referential, level? He cautions: "The referent is some kind of new life, but the exact form remains to be determined. The mere fact that the visionary level involves concrete physical representation does not by itself determine the nature of the referential level" (Poythress 46).

Before proceeding to discuss Revelation 20 further, specifically the significance of the symbolism in the passage as it applies to millennial thought, Poythress returns to Revelation 13. In that discussion he introduces several possibilities and suggestions for the meaning of the body, head, wound, healing, etc., that appear in that setting. What historical reference(s) do these things suggest? He lists several, more than once introducing another option with "or." And his conclusion? The final "or"... "Or all of these? We may have opinions on these matters. But we cannot directly read off the answer from 13:3" (Poythress 47). His cautionary hesitancy, reflected in the words "we cannot directly read off the answer," reflects his greater concern and respect for the nature of the Biblical text—its inspiration, authority, and meaning—than it does an unwillingness to dig deeper to uncover its truths. In the end Poythress suggests "that similar flexibility is in order when we come to images of genuine new life elsewhere in Revelation" (47). Poythress does not

endorse “similar flexibility” in the exegesis of every Biblical text, but he certainly advocates for it in this type of Biblical literature.

In the following paragraphs Poythress segues from the imagery of Revelation 13’s beast to what he deems an “analogous situation with 20:1-6” (47). As he did with the prior text, Poythress suggests multiple historical points of connection in this passage including “a bodily resurrection, or new birth, or an enthronement of the disembodied souls of martyrs to reign with Christ in heaven” (47). If one of these options was intended, the four levels of his model would reflect that intention. As he continues to draw parallels between the interpretation of chapters 13 and 20, he asserts that the words used in the latter text referring to resurrection and life are just as literal, or not, as those used describing the beast in the former passage. His point:

In neither case do the words, by themselves, provide any clue as to whether the symbolic, visionary depiction enjoys a direct or indirect relation to its historical referent. The nature of the referent remains unsettled. The vocabulary is what it is because it describes a vision, not because it literally describes the referent of the vision. (Poythress 47)

The fourth section of Poythress’ article, titled “Concerning Literalism,” speaks to his concerns with premillennial interpretations, more specifically with dispensational premillennial approaches. He opens that section with these words:

Many premillennialists have thus skirted

some key issues when appealing to the supposed literalness of the first resurrection. They have neglected the visionary and symbolic levels of the discourse. In fact premillennial interpreters have often applied a similar literalistic interpretive strategy to the rest of Revelation and to much of OT prophecy as well.

In such a strategy, the visionary level and symbolic level are virtually collapsed into the referential level. Throughout Revelation the visions are then understood to be direct transcriptions of future history. Partly for this reason most premillennialists are futurist in their interpretation of Revelation. If the visions are more or less direct reproductions of the events, they cannot have been fulfilled in the past. The future just prior to the second coming remains the only arena in which the strange visionary forms of Revelation could find direct, literalistic embodiment. (Poythress 48)

Most of this fourth segment introduces and then discusses the line of interpretive thought employed by John F. Walvoord in his commentary on Revelation. Walvoord, according to Poythress, though acknowledging symbolism in the Apocalypse, “permits in practice a fairly thoroughgoing suppression of symbolism” (49). Poythress proceeds to critique Walvoord’s interpretive “suppression of symbolism” by citing illustrative cases of Walvoord’s approach, contradictory perceptions by others who use the same approach, and

appropriate correctives of his own along the way.

In the fifth and final part of his article, “Looking Afresh At Rev. 20:1-6,” Poythress briefly draws everything together as he suggests his own take on the text. He introduces that portion of his article by first noting the different possibilities of the text’s referents and then a caveat about how a thorough going examination of all possible referents was “beyond the scope of this paper” (Poythress 53). The possibilities that Poythress puts forward not only include a “millennial period following the second coming,” but also “the regeneration of believers,...a postmillennial triumph of the gospel,...[and] the vindication of martyrs and other persecuted and suffering Christians in a heavenly reign” (52). Of the proposed options presented, Poythress thinks that the vindication of martyrs most consistently fits the context:

In view of the freedom and fluidity in the use of the visionary form, any interpretive solution must involve some tentativeness. But I think that a reference to heavenly vindication of martyrs is the most sensible interpretation of Rev 20:1-6. The immediate reference to “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God” (20:4) as well as the fact that the seven churches faced threats of persecution and martyrdom (2:10; 2:13) make such a theme more relevant than any of the others. (53)

His final thoughts: “In any case, one general conclusion definitely follows. The intrinsic flexibility and relative indirectness of the correspondence between vision

and referent in Revelation as a whole should make all interpreters hold their views on Rev 20:1-10 with less dogmatism” (Poythress 54).

### **A Return To Mathewson**

As previously noted, Mathewson devotes significant time and energy to explaining and defending the recapitulation of Revelation 19:11-21 in Revelation 20:1-6. Though our present interest of understanding the meaning of “thousand years” in Revelation 20 might not occupy the space that recapitulation does in Mathewson, it still receives significant attention. That attention might be said to start with the question “how long” asked by souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-10. In the immediate context they are told that they would have to wait “a little while longer” before their time was completed (Rev. 6:11). Mathewson’s contention, similar in some respects to Poythress: “Therefore, the millennium functions as a fulfillment of these promises and as a response to the cry of the saints for vindication” (243).

As he develops his understanding “that the millennium of 20:4-6 is a consummate response to these earlier promises,” Mathewson ties Revelation 20:1-6 to the account of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 (244). He assumes that the vindication of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 parallels the vindication of the saints in Revelation 20, both occurring at judgment. As he deals with the chronological timing—or historical placement—of the thousand years he also argues strongly against a literal thousand-year period of time.

Mathewson responds, in part, to Thomas’ contention that “It [the number one thousand] is the plain statement of the text six times. It is doubtful that any symbolic number, if there be such, is ever repeated that many times” (246). His reasoning: “the apocalyptic style of Revelation and the



symbolic nature of its communicative strategy (see 1:1) strongly argue against this” (Mathewson 246).

As part of his argument against a literal thousand years, Mathewson observes that the number focuses more on the “character” of “completeness” more so than the actual length of time reflected in the words. Citing Beale he says “Thus, what is important is not a duration of time, but ‘the thematic idea of the ultimate victory of Christians who have suffered’” (Mathewson 247). We can see that the words “thousand years” focus more on the character of completeness than a literal time span by comparing it with other numerical references to days, years, etc.

Mathewson notes that the “the importance of the reference to one thousand years in Revelation 20:1-6 is to be perceived primarily in contrast to other temporal designations scattered throughout the Apocalypse which describe the ongoing struggle of the saints at the hands of Satan and the beast” (247). For example, the church at Smyrna would endure “tribulation ten days” (Rev. 2:10), “a temporal designation that probably alludes to the ten days of testing of Daniel’s three friends in Dan 1:12-15” (Mathewson 247). The time period was not the emphasis, the trouble was the frequent references to a “half of seven”—either three and one-half years, or forty-two months, or one thousand, two hundred sixty days—refers to a period of “a time of tribulation and testing...understood in its contrast to the ubiquitous number seven” (Mathewson 247). The number seven reflects completeness, but its half does not. Mathewson concludes this paragraph with these lines:

The significance and function of the number one thousand in Rev 20:1-6 can be seen in contrast to these numerical designations which depict the time of the

church's struggle. In contrast to the imperfect and incomplete suffering of the church signified by three and one-half years, the saints' reign and vindication will be complete. While the church's suffering is portrayed with a number of short, limited duration, the reign and vindication of the saints is portrayed with a number of far greater magnitude: they will live and reign for one thousand years. (247)

At several points following, Mathewson draws similar conclusions (248):

(1) The millennium in 20:1-6 functions as a climax to the promises in 2:26-27; 3:20 and as a response to the plea of the martyred saints in 6:9-10. As several scholars have indicated, within the discourse of Revelation the millennium functions primarily as a reward for and the vindication of the saints who have suffered for their faithful witness on earth.

(2) The vindication of the saints in vv. 4-6 is clearly to be understood in connection to the mention of Satan's binding and ultimate demise in vv. 1-3 and 7-11. Thus, the millennium functions in contrast to what we read of Satan and his cohort, the beast, in earlier chapters of Revelation and of Satan's ultimate demise in 20:1-10.

(3) In view of the foregoing discussion, I

would suggest that the reference to the one thousand years is important, not for the temporal information it conveys, but for its meaning and thematic value: it metaphorically portrays the complete victory and vindication of the saints at the Parousia of Christ. Therefore, I do not think that the one thousand years functions to refer to an actual period of time, but symbolically portrays completeness and is to be seen in contrast to the shorter and imperfect temporal designations (ten days, three and one-half years, short time) which depict the church's pre-consummate struggles against Satan and the beast. In this way, the millennial kingdom is another graphic portrayal of the victory and vindication of God's people at the end of history depicted in 11:11-12, 18.

Before concluding his article, Mathewson returns to further explain how his understanding of the symbolic nature of the thousand years fits in with his recapitulation thesis. Citing Poythress, he ends as did Poythress with a caution against "being overly dogmatic about any position" (251).

### **The Text Of Revelation 20: What It Does And Does Not Say**

Though we will not take the time to engage in a full exposition of Revelation 20:1-7, we will close by noting, briefly, some key things the text says, how to evaluate what it says, and finish with some things that the text does not say.

As we noted in our review of the use of the term "thousand," the text of Revelation 20:1-7 uses the phrase "thousand years" six times. Those six uses are as follows:

First, Revelation 20:2 tells us that the angel (cf. Rev. 20:1) would lay hold of the dragon and bind him for a thousand years. Second, Revelation 20:3 informs us that Satan's ability to deceive nations would resume at the conclusion of a thousand years. Third, Revelation 20:4 says that the souls who were beheaded for the cause of Christ (cf. Rev. 6:10) "lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." Fourth, Revelation 20:5 teaches that others who died "did not live again until the thousand years were finished." Fifth, Revelation 20:6 states that those who had a part in the first resurrection would "reign with Him a thousand years." And finally, sixth, Revelation 20:7 says that "when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison."

Even a cursory reading of the text yields the conclusion that something about a "thousand years" was then, and remains now, central to its meaning. The greater question: what was that meaning? We need to know several things to determine the meaning: First, we need to know what John's initial audience understood. Second, we need to know what John intended as he recorded the visions in the Apocalypse. Third, and most importantly, we need to know what God intended in the text. Hopefully, John grasped that intention. And, just as hopefully, John's first readers grasped it. Fourth, and at the very end of the line, we ask, what do we know about the text? We cannot know what God never intended, what God never revealed to John, what John never knew, and what the first century readers never grasped...so, if we know anything about the text, we must start with the understanding that God, John, and those early Christians had of Revelation. Let's review that process more fully.

Far too frequently we read the Bible to find out "what it means to me." We might be looking for a solution to some matter that we have personal interest in and, consequently,

our inquiry takes on a very personal, subjective nature. While we are never wrong to have personal involvement in seeking Scripture's meaning, it can be wrong to assume that because we personally come to some conclusion that our conclusion must be right (Apple).

Studying the Bible to find out "what it means to me," though probably the most frequently used approach, must not be the only perspective we should have when we read and study God's Word. Consider the following guidelines that have been used to determine the intent of Scriptures:

1. What does the Bible mean to me?
2. What did the Bible mean to the original hearers/readers?
3. What did the Bible mean to the original speakers/writers?
4. And finally, what did God mean (i.e., intend) when He wrote the Bible?

While each perspective carries weight, only the fourth should serve as our ultimate guideline. We can answer the first three to our satisfaction and still not have an understanding of what God intended in a text. Let me explain.

We have already observed that a purely personal perspective in interpreting a text can be dangerous. Placing ourselves at the center of life, generally, and of Biblical exegesis specifically, potentially yields subjective explanations (cf. Deu. 12:8; Jud. 17:6; Jud. 21:25; Pro. 12:15; Pro. 21:2; 2 Cor. 10:12). These texts, and others too, warn about the dangers (and folly) of those who "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). An over emphasis on the "what does the Bible mean to me" type of approach to Biblical interpretation leans toward subjectivism and existentialism, both overtly self-centered approaches.

The second question, seeking the understanding of the original audience (hearers or readers), sounds like a proper perspective to keep in mind. But it overlooks the possibility that the original audience misunderstood what they heard or read. The Ethiopian eunuch read God's Word but he did not understand it, at least not initially (Acts 8:26ff). Jesus often asked His audience: "have you not read?" The truth was in the Scriptures which the Jews read, but for some reason (often hardness of heart) they did not grasp their intent (cf. Mat. 12:3; Mat. 19:4; Mat. 21:16, 42; Mat. 22:31; Mark 2:25; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3; Luke 10:26).

Note, for example, Paul's message to the church at Thessalonica. In his first epistle to the church there, Paul gave instructions concerning the coming of the Lord (1 The. 4:13-5:11). Evidently some in Thessalonica assumed that those who died in Christ prior to His return (i.e., those who had "fallen asleep," 1 The. 4:13) would not witness the resurrection and had "no hope." Paul's message provided comfort and assurance. Those who died in Christ would actually "rise first" (1 The. 4:16), then those alive at His coming would be "caught up together with them" (1 The. 4:17).

But even after writing to the church the first time, there seemed to be a misunderstanding concerning the Lord's return. In his second letter to the church Paul continued to address matters relative to this subject (2 The. 1:7ff; 2 The. 2:1ff). Though he already instructed them in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that "the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night," he needed to remind them about the matter again in 2 Thessalonians 2. It seems that some in the church did not understand the message the first time.

Understanding the Scriptures, therefore, from the viewpoint of the original audience will only be beneficial if we can know that the original audience understood what God

wanted them to know. To know that we would have to know what God intended first.

The third question, seeking to know what the original authors knew, also sounds like a proper position to assume in our study. If we had their understanding, then certainly we would know what the Bible means. A problem arises, however, when we learn that the authors (speakers or writers) did not always have a complete understanding of the things they were saying. That sounds ridiculous, but it's true nonetheless. Peter tells us that the Old Testament prophets did not have an understanding of the things they were speaking about concerning salvation:

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into. (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

Peter, though the primary spokesman on the day of Pentecost, did not fully comprehend what he said in Acts 2:39 about the universal nature of God's redemptive offer. In Acts 10 and 11 God had to reveal to him that the Gentiles were included in God's plan to save man. That salient point had to

be taught over and over in the early church, yet it was plain in the mind and plan of God from eternity.

Only the last perspective, seeking what God intends, serves as an absolute guideline for our efforts in studying the Bible. We have seen that we can misunderstand the Scripture if we look only for what it means to us. We have also seen that we can misunderstand the Scripture if we look only at the understanding of the original audience, or even if we look only at the understanding of the original authors. But we cannot misunderstand the Scriptures if we find out what God really intends. That objective, as you might imagine, will always be easier to state and describe than to fulfill. Yet, that objective must be kept in mind. Though all of the other questions can benefit us, they can also mislead us. As you study, look for what God intended. God says that it can be done.

We noted earlier that Mathewson cited R. Thomas who reasoned that “It [the number one thousand] is the plain statement of the text six times. It is doubtful that any symbolic number, if there be such, is ever repeated that many times” (246). But we, as did Mathewson at that point, wonder what makes the frequency of the words “thousand years” inherently demand a literal time period of that duration. The word “twelve” appears more than twenty times in Revelation, but does its twenty plus occurrences demand that we read it as the literal number twelve in each instance? The word “seven” occurs more than thirty times in the Apocalypse. Does each use independently and/or collectively demand that we think only of the numerical equivalent of seven as we interpret the text? These examples, easily expanded, do not prove the literalness of their use in Revelation.

Though we have not fully expounded the meaning of either Revelation 20 or the words “thousand years,” as both



Mathewson and Poythress have noted, we cannot dismiss the obvious symbolism through the book of Revelation, especially in this selection of the text. Furthermore, we must take extra precautions as we implement our interpretive models, paying particular attention to the nature of the genres of Scripture we are studying at the moment.

In closing, consider these assumptions that some proponents of premillennialism make against the backdrop of the four interpretive questions we just asked. First, premillennialism assumes that Christ's reign will be yet future. Before we determine what we think about the matter, we must ask these questions: What did John, the writer, and what did the original audience—the seven churches of Asia and other first century Christians—understand about Christ's future reign? What did God, through John to those Christians, intend about the matter? If Scripture interprets Scripture, then both 1 Corinthians 15:25 and Romans 8:34 must be considered, each of which reflects a then present reign of Christ.

Second, premillennialism presumes a literal reign of Christ on the literal earth. The same questions that we asked a moment ago must be asked. What did John, the writer, and what did the original audience—the seven churches of Asia and other first century Christians—understand about a literal reign of Christ on the literal earth? What did God, through John to those Christians, intend about the matter? Hebrews 8:1 and Hebrews 8:4 state that Christ was not, at that time, on the earth but that He was already seated at the right hand of God in the heavens.

Third, as we have thoroughly discussed in this material, premillennialism presupposes that Christ's reign will be a literal time span of one thousand years. The same questions await: What did John and the first century audience

understand about the thousand-year reign? And what did God intend? If our understanding does not square with theirs, and especially God's, then we have placed ourselves at the center of determining textual meaning. We have observed already that, comparatively speaking, the thousand-year period was intended to refer to a complete, full reign with Christ as opposed to the limited, the partial, three and one-half—and synonymous—expressions used throughout Revelation.

Fourth, premillennialists often conclude that Christ's future reign will literally occur on David's throne in Jerusalem. What did God, through John, intend the early readers to know about Christ and David's throne? Romans declares that Christ was shown to be the seed of David "according to the flesh" when God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 1:1-4). Nothing in the angelic statement to Mary in Luke 1:33 demands a literal throne. In fact, in Acts 2:29ff, Peter stated that Christ was, at that time, already resurrected to sit on a throne, but not a literal one.

Fifth, premillennialism believes that the future thousand-year reign will take place when the temple returns to Jerusalem. We ask once again: What did John and the seven churches of Asia understand about the "rebuilding" of the temple? What did God reveal through John to these churches about the subject? Would these Christians, living within a generation of the temple's destruction, have assumed that God was planning to rebuild it in anticipation of a future kingdom, involving a literal throne of David, in the literal city of Jerusalem? In Acts 15:14-21 James, citing Amos 9:11-12, explained that the rebuilding of the breaks in David's tabernacle was fulfilled by the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's kingdom. The closing chapters of Revelation tell us that God and the Christ are the temple we should want to see (Rev. 21:22).

Sixth, those who uphold premillennialism maintain that the nation of Israel will be converted, wholesale, and finally return to their homeland in Palestine. What did God through John to the early church intend? If we consider the rest of the New Testament, we will see that it focuses on the spiritual nature of Israel more than the physical, a spiritual nature that applies to all who, like Abraham, are saved by faith through grace (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:27-28). God's redeemed, Jews and Gentiles, have comprised the Israel of God since Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:8; Acts 8:4; Acts 11:19; Acts 15:14-21; Gal. 3:6ff).

Seventh, premillennialists reason that, as part of the wholesale conversion of Israel and their return to Palestine, the "lost" ten tribes will return. The same questions still apply. Did God, John, or the early church intend, reveal, or understand this? The Old Testament indicates that "great numbers" left the northern tribes in Israel and went to Jerusalem when false systems of worship were instituted (2 Chr. 15:9; 2 Chr. 11:16; cf. Ezra 8:35). Nothing in the First Testament text teaches that any tribes were "lost." Many did return to the land of Canaan after the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, but that should not be taken to mean that those who failed to return were "lost."

Eighth, premillennialism presupposes that Christ's initial attempt to establish His kingdom was rejected, thus prompting Him to postpone and establish it upon His return. What was God's intention? What did John know? What did John reveal to first century Christians in Revelation? When Peter stood up to speak on Pentecost he cited, by the Spirit's influence, Joel 2:28-32 and stated that this text was fulfilled on that day. That passage, along with other Old Testament prophecies (cf. Dan. 2:44; Isa. 2:1ff; et al.), taught that God not only really intended to establish a kingdom during the

first century, He did so (Mark 9:1). John, in fact, referenced the then existing kingdom at least twice in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:6; Rev. 1:9).

Ninth, premillennialists often advocate for multiple resurrections of the dead at different points in history. Some, usually the righteous dead, will be raised at the beginning of the thousand-year reign, and others, usually the wicked dead, will be resurrected at the end of the millennium. What has God revealed about the matter? What did He reveal to John? What did John write in his vision to the early church? Both John 6:40 and John 6:44 speak of a resurrection that will occur “at the last day.” Jesus, in John 12:48 spoke about judgment “in the last day.” Nothing in those three passages presents multiple resurrections occurring at different times. Additionally, John 5:28-29 indicates that the resurrection of life for those who have done well and the resurrection of condemnation for those who have done evil occurs simultaneously. Finally, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 declares that Christ’s return and judgment, including the punishment for sin and the glorification of His saints, all occurs “in that day,” indicating a singular point in time rather than multiple points in time.

Tenth, and last, premillennialism interprets the expression “last days” as referring to the millennium. Since that thousand-year reign has not started, we are, according to this line of thought, not yet in the “last days.” For the last time we ask: Where did God intentionally reveal this message? Did he reveal it to John? Did John know this? Did John write this in his apocalyptic vision to the churches of Asia? Did the Christians in those churches know this? The prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Joel all spoke of the last days (Isa. 2:1ff; Mic. 4:1ff; Joel 2:28ff). As previously noted, Peter, citing Joel, said that Joel’s message was fulfilled on

that day and specifically used the expression “last days” to refer to that present age. Though the prophets predicted the events that would transpire in the “last days,” the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 1:1-2) distinguished between their “times” and his day, calling the latter “these last days.” Luke, Paul, James, and Peter all use the expression “last days” or “last times” to refer to their current, first century age (Acts 2:17, quoting Peter citing Joel; 2 Tim. 3:1; Jam. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:20, last times; 2 Pet. 3:3).

John, Revelation’s author and an inspired apostle, certainly would have been familiar with this use of the term “last days.” He does not, however, use it either in Revelation or anywhere else in his writings. Interestingly though, John used the expression “last day” seven times in his Gospel (John 6:39; John 6:40; John 6:44; John 6:54; John 7:37; John 11:24; John 12:48). Without exception, all seven appearances use the singular form of day. Six of those occurrences specifically refer to “last day” in the sense of the end of time and judgment. The only exception occurs in John 7:37 where the words “last day” referred to the final day of the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast was referenced seven times in the chapter (John 7:2; John 7:8 twice; John 7:10-11 twice; John 7:14; John 7:37). The expression “last days” with “days” as plural appears as noted earlier in Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; Jam. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3. If John wanted to teach that the millennium was part of the last-day-end-of-time-judgment-scene motif, he certainly knew how to do so. Those singular “last day” occurrences all appear in his Gospel, not in Revelation. None of the Gospel’s occurrences can be remotely construed to include a millennial reign.

### **Conclusion**

Our approach to this text still leaves much to be desired. As indicated earlier, we have not taken the time and

opportunity to fully develop an in-depth analysis of Revelation 20. We have, however, laid a reasonable amount of foundational groundwork on which to build. Our introduction and brief discussion of the terms translated as some form of “thousand” in the New Testament could easily be expanded, but it has provided details enough to see that the term cannot be easily and Scripturally manipulated to support millennial theory. Our limited use of the articles by Mathewson and Poythress, both deserving of more full-blown exploration, proved worthwhile in that each built a very comprehensive case to preclude a literal interpretation of the phrase “thousand years.” And finally, our consideration of what the text of Revelation does and does not say, though cursory and thus imperfect, sets the stage for a more thoroughgoing examination of Revelation 20. In the end, while incomplete, we hope these efforts have answered more questions than they have raised and have provided enough stimuli for the dedicated student to dig deeper into God’s Word.

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## Once Saved, Always Saved

*Chris Perry*



Chris Perry is married to the former Danyelle Templeton, and together they have three children: Jordan, Cydney Jane, and Bennett. Chris is a 2002 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. He received his B.A. in English from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He is currently the minister for the Hebron congregation in McMinnville, Tennessee, where he has served for the past fifteen years. He also teaches Bible and English at Boyd Christian School.

### **Introduction**

Country music has long been considered the genre that most accurately represents common, mainstream American ideals. In the midst of the consumerism of the 1980s, Merle Haggard asked, “Are the Good Times Really Over?” voicing the concerns of the average American. More recently, Brad Paisley pointed out that, while other genres would not address topics like cancer and loss, “This is Country Music” and “we do.” Thus, the country genre can serve as a mirror for the views and experiences of a large segment of American life as opposed to the fringe views and experiences often displayed by pop and other music genres.

This idea is of note when attempting to take the pulse of mainstream “Christianity” (a word used in an accommodative sense here). Consider the following quotes from various country songs:

1. “Get a little wild on Saturday night/But make sure she's home before the mornin' light/Sunday she's all ribbons and curls/Rock my world little country girl” (Brooks and Dunn).
2. “I ain't the kind you take home to mama/I ain't the

kind to wear no ring/Somehow I always get stronger/When I'm on my second drink/...Cause I heard Jesus he drank wine/And I bet we'd get along just fine/He could calm a storm and heal the blind/And I bet he'd understand a heart like mine” (Miranda Lambert).

3. “It's where I drank my first beer/It's where I found Jesus...I learned the path to heaven/Is full of sinners and believers” (Brooks and Dunn).

These quotes, as well as a myriad more that echo these, depict Christianity in general, and salvation specifically, as something that exists separate from the lives we live. Loose living, drinking, and other worldly endeavors can coexist with spirituality they say, and heaven can be the future home of someone who is impenitently sinful.

Unfortunately, this idea is central to what many consider mainstream, modern Christianity today. As a doctrine, once saved, always saved has permeated every crack and crevice of religion and has become an assumed truth by many in the religious world. It has become so popular, in fact, that there is little need to define the doctrine. Sadly, many who know nothing more about Christianity than what they hear in a country song or from a televangelist believe their souls to be perfectly secure because of this doctrine, and many others who should know better from their studies of God's Word hold doggedly to its tenets.

To arm ourselves against the doctrine of once saved, always saved, we will first begin by examining its history, from its roots in Augustine and his personal struggles with sin, to its modern expression in the free grace theology. Next, we will refute the doctrine by noticing both the passages people commonly cite in its defense and those that clearly deny its validity.



## **History Of Once Saved, Always Saved** ***Augustine And The Doctrine Of Original Sin***

Augustine of Hippo was born in November of 354 to a heathen father and Christian mother (again, “Christian” is used here in an accommodative sense) (Schaff 3). His impression on the religious world would be a lasting one, as his *Confessions* and other works would enumerate several doctrines that would be the cornerstones of religious dogma for centuries to come. Arguably his most important contribution to religious thought centers around his defense and explanation of the doctrine of original sin. And it is this idea that becomes the bedrock for once saved, always saved.

Augustine stated his views on original sin very plainly and did so frequently throughout his writings. In his two books entitled *Ad Simplicianum*, he wrote, “Therefore all men are...one condemned mass [massa damnata] of sin, that owes a debt of punishment to the divine and supreme justice. Whether it [the debt] be exacted, or whether it be condoned, there is no injustice” (ewtn.com). According to Augustine, man becomes a *massa damnata* through the communication of *concupiscence* (Schaff, *History III*: 9). As the *New World Encyclopedia* explains,

Augustine of Hippo countered this optimistic view [of the Pelagians, discussed later] with the doctrine of original sin, in which he taught that, through their sin, Adam and Eve had passed on an innate tendency to sin—concupiscence—which could never be overcome by human effort, requiring God's intervening grace for salvation.

To further this idea, Augustine described an infant as sinful

because he “cried for the breast” when he was full or was “jealous though it could not speak” when he perceived his siblings (*Confessions* VII: 11). In summary, Augustine believed that mankind was saddled with the sin of Adam which corrupted his nature through inherited concupiscence, leaving him incapable of doing good.

Much of Augustine’s discourse on original sin was done to combat the advance of Pelagianism, a set of beliefs set forth by Pelagius, a Roman monk who was his contemporary. The basic tenets of Pelagianism include (Harrison 399-400):

1. “Sufficiency of human nature as created by God,” that is, man has the capacity to choose good or evil, without his nature being changed by an internal act of grace.
2. “There was no inherited inclination to evil in human nature,” meaning man did not inherit Adam’s sin, nor is there weakness inherent in humanity.
3. “Every infant born into the world was in the same condition as Adam was before the fall,” a statement that obviously denies original sin.

This resistance forced Augustine to refine and restate his positions and was in many ways a catalyst for much of Augustine’s later writings.

Interestingly, Augustine’s belief in original sin led him to the doctrine under consideration in this study: perseverance of the saints, or once saved, always saved. In his controversy with Pelagius, Augustine claimed, “I assert....that the perseverance by which we persevere in Christ even to the end is the gift of God” (Davis 213). In the same vein, he described the power of God. In his view:

[God’s power] which both begins a man's  
faith and which enables it to persevere unto

the end **is not given in respect of our merits**, but is given according to His own most secret and at the same time most righteous, wise, and beneficent will; since those whom He predestinated, them He also called, with that calling of which it is said, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” (Davis 213)

Augustine’s insistence that an un-losable salvation is “not given in respect of our merits” demonstrates the connection between original sin—that is, the belief that man is totally depraved, and thus unable to do good—and perseverance. He believed that since God has to **change us by the power of the Holy Spirit** because of the “filthiness of our spirit,” that change **cannot be undone by mankind** and thus our salvation will persevere (*Confessions* VII:8).

#### ***Calvinism And The Development Of The TULIP Doctrine***

John Calvin, in many respects, systematized the doctrines that had begun with Augustine and continued through other theologians over the centuries. As Schaff explains of Calvin, “...they [other reformers and theologians] cut the stones in the quarries, he polished them in the workshop. They produced the new ideas, he constructed them into a system” (*History* VIII: 8). It is no wonder, then, that many of the principles developed and expanded by Augustine take center stage in Calvin’s work. To be sure “...[on] the doctrines of the fall, of total depravity, the slavery of the human will, the sovereignty of saving grace, the bishop of Hippo [Augustine] and the pastor of Geneva [Calvin] are essentially agreed” (*ibid.*).

Though Calvin’s theology did not come to bear the acronym “TULIP” until long after his death in 1564, the five central points were clearly defined in his teachings. Briefly

defined, they are:

1. **Total hereditary depravity:** the doctrine of original sin. Note the word “total” indicating the complete destitute state of man, wholly incapable of doing good.
2. **Unconditional election:** the doctrine of predestination. This aspect of Calvinism has received the greatest resistance in the denominational world. Per Schaff, “his predestinarian system has been effectively opposed by the Arminians, the Quakers, and the Methodists, and is undergoing a serious revision in the Presbyterian and Calvinistic Churches of Europe and America” (*History*, VIII: 14).
3. **Limited atonement:** the doctrine that Christ only died for the elect, that is, those who would believe in the future. If Calvinism were to allow for Jesus’ atonement to be universal then, according to their system, **everyone would be saved.**
4. **Irresistible grace:** in keeping with the idea of original sin, God must perform a work of power on a person in order for their will to bend to His. Therefore, obedience is not an act of man’s will, but of God’s grace.
5. **Perseverance of the saints:** the doctrine that a saved person cannot be lost. As mentioned above, this is the natural outgrowth of original sin since the sinner, incapable of good, must have the Holy Spirit operate on him, and therefore he is powerless to change the course of his soul.

It is vitally important to understand **the interconnectedness of these tenets.** We should note, “Calvinism has the advantage of logical compactness, consistency, and completeness. Admitting its premises, it is difficult to escape its conclusions. **A system can only be overthrown by a**

system” (Schaff, *History* VIII: 14). There are those in denominations today who seek to be “three-point” or “four-point” Calvinists, among whom the following author desires to be numbered:

...in the interest of full disclosure, **I am a 3 ¼ point Calvinist** if you evaluate my theology utilizing the template of 5 point Calvinism. I believe in about ¾ of T (Total Depravity), ¾ of U (Unconditional Election), and ¾ of I (Irresistible Grace), none of L (Limited Atonement) and all of P (Perseverance of the Saints). (Land)

Despite these and other similar claims, however, the system stands or falls as a system.

***The Free Grace Theology: Modern Perseverance***

While I do not claim to know the complete theological views of the “3 ¼ point Calvinist” above, it might very well be that he fits into the emanation of the once saved, always saved doctrine now under consideration: free grace. Essentially, free grace is the unapologetic modern grandchild of Calvinism. The difference—and it is an important one—lies in the ideas of Christian living and repentance. Note one author’s defense of Calvinism when considering perseverance: “Warnings against falling away, they say, are not inconsistent with striving, for merely professing Christians may fall away from that profession and are warned of the seriousness thereof, while true Christians may test their condition by their resistance to this temptation” (Harrison 404). In essence, the Calvinist’s argument when confronted with passages relating to “falling away” is: “the truly elect will not sin so as to fall away; if they do, **they were never really elect to begin with.**”

However, the free grace proponent has no concern for such arguments. Rather, they take Calvinism to its logical extreme, advocating that **repentance is not required for salvation**. Note these excerpts from the Doctrinal Statement posted on the website of the Dallas Theological Seminary:

We believe, also, that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ...that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the Apostles can add in the very least degree to the value of the blood, or to the merit of the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity with perfect and sinless humanity.

...he [the convert] is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is therefore in no way required by God to seek a so-called “second blessing,” or a “second work of grace.”

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness...

As Charles Stanley states in his book, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?*, “Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, his salvation is not in jeopardy...believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation” (Wikipedia.org). This, in all likelihood, is the doctrine behind the country music lyrics mentioned above, and it seems to be the variation of once saved, always saved that has most permeated pop-Christianity throughout our world today.

### **Refutation Of Once Saved, Always Saved**

#### ***Passages Used By Proponents Of Once Saved, Always Saved***

While the approaches used by supporters of perseverance are likely as varied as the supporters themselves, there are common passages that are referenced regularly. Primarily, these passages are concentrated in the writings of John—his Gospel account and First Epistle—and Paul—largely Romans and Ephesians. It should become apparent as we consider these passages, however, that these passages do not support the doctrine of once saved, always saved.

Consider first the several passages in John’s writings. In John 5:24 Jesus proclaims, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (KJV). Proponents of perseverance will point to several components of this verse: “shall not come into condemnation” and “is passed from death to life.” They will claim several things:

1. Those who are saved will avoid condemnation **with no seeming conditions stated.**
2. Those same souls will pass from death to life—**a passage that they claim is irreversible.**

However, a quick survey of the verse and its context reveals

some interesting things. First, each of the verbs in verse 24 (“heareth” and “believeth”) represent continuous action, indicating that the one who will not come into condemnation is the one who **continues to hear and believe**. As well, notice an interesting passage in the immediate context: “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). It is important to notice that the ones who will “come forth...unto the resurrection of life” are not those who have believed one time in the past and will “persevere,” but rather those who have “done good.” The emphasis, in context, is on faithful, obedient living, in comparison to the doubt and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Another passage in John’s Gospel account which is often used to support once saved, always saved is John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” Certainly Christ’s statements that “they shall never perish” and “no man is able to pluck them out of my hand” seem, at first glance, to support Calvinistic ideology. However, remember that these sheep are the ones who hear His voice (John 10:16) and follow it (John 10:4-5). As well, while Jesus assures His sheep that no one will be able to steal them, He says nothing about His own sheep wandering away of their own accord (Luke 15:4-7).

While space will not permit the discussion of every passage, statements such as 1 John 3:9 should be noted: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His seed



remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” The ESV has an interesting rendering of this passage: “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Note that the emphasis is on a continuous, conscious practice of sinning, something that cannot be done if one is to be faithful to God. In reality, then, this verse **teaches against the doctrine of once saved, always saved** because it reminds us that habitual sin and the new birth are incompatible.

Many proponents of perseverance appeal to Paul’s mention of “sealing” by the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14 and Ephesians 4:30. While space will not allow a thorough discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit, a parallel passage should be noted. In 2 Corinthians 1:22, Paul says that God has sealed “us” (the apostles, as 2 Corinthians 1:21 references “us” and “you”) and given them “the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” From this, two observations are in order:

1. It is possible this is in reference to miraculous ability given by God to first century Christians. If so, this would fit in the context of Ephesians 1:13-14, where the Jews and Gentiles were “gathered together” (verse 10), the Spirit sent as a “seal” of approval for the Gentiles in Acts 10.
2. If indeed Paul was “sealed” in the sense that Calvinism would claim, why did he “keep under [his] body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when [he had] preached to others, [he] should be a castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27)? One who was “sealed” in the manner some suggest would have very little reason to worry about being a “castaway.”

### ***Passages That Defeat Once Saved, Always Saved***

There are numerous and varied passages that refute

the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. Certainly, one must approach this topic in the same manner as any other Biblical passage or topic: “that which is perspicuous [clear] must declare the meaning of that which is doubtful” (Dungan 356). In other words, the plain passages should be used to shed light on those that might be more difficult. To be sure, there are a host of clear passages that soundly put to rest the idea that a Christian cannot sin so as to be eternally lost.

First, there are those passages that directly describe “falling.” The most well-known is Galatians 5:4: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; **ye are fallen from grace.**” To deny that a Christian can fall from grace is to deny the very thing that Paul said could happen to a group of Christians. But there are far more “falling” passages in the New Testament. Consider the following list:

1. 1 Corinthians 10:12: the Christian must “...take heed lest he fall.”
2. 1 Timothy 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:7: candidates for the eldership can “fall into the condemnation of the devil.”
3. 1 Timothy 6:9: Christians can “fall” into destruction and perdition by loving money.
4. Hebrews 4:11: Christians can “fall” into unbelief as the Israelites did.
5. Hebrews 6:6: Christians can “fall away” to the extent that their rejection of Christ leaves them no way to “renew again unto repentance.”

Thus, while Calvinism, free grace, and other systems might teach that a Christian cannot fall, direct Biblical teaching indicates otherwise.

As well, we would do well to note the many times **the possibility of falling away is implied.** The two-letter word

“if” is powerful in passages such as 2 Peter 1:10: “...**if** ye do these things [the Christian graces], ye shall never fall.” The clear implication is: if I **do not do these** things, I shall fall! In Revelation 2:10-11, the church at Smyrna is told that if they are “faithful unto death,” Christ will give them “a crown of life,” and He goes on to reassure them that “he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” The inevitable question that must be asked is: what if I am **not faithful** or I **do not overcome**? And throughout the letters to the seven churches, Jesus makes statements that directly indicate **entire congregations can fall away!** In Revelation 2:5, He warns Ephesus to “repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will **remove thy candlestick out of his place...**” A similar statement is found in Revelation 3:5, in which Jesus says He will “not **blot out his name out of the book of life...**” and leaves the reader to again answer the question, “What if I do not overcome?”

Of course, as mentioned earlier, the Calvinist will retort, “The one who sins like these verses teach was never saved to begin with!” However, the churches in Revelation—and thus the members of those churches who were in danger of falling away—had their candlesticks **in place**, a clear indication of salvation. As well, “falling” indicates that there is something from which we can fall. To the Calvinist, the question must be asked, “From what were all of these people in danger of falling, if not from salvation?” Certainly there can be no satisfactory answer.

When we add to these passages and principles the myriad others that detail judgment based on “works” and “deeds” (2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12-13, etc....), it becomes clear that **a Christian can sin so as to lose his eternal salvation.** Despite the centuries of writing by the “church fathers,” and despite the lyrics, books, and popular

thoughts to the contrary, once saved, always saved is not a Biblical doctrine. It is sad, indeed, that a great number of people will lose their souls following a convenient, comfortable doctrine that can provide them nothing but false hope. It is my prayer that we all will consider the possibility of being lost as real, and yet find comfort and hope in the truth of the Gospel and the power of Christ's blood.

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## My Spouse: Heirs Together Of The Grace Of Life

*Neal Pollard*



Neal Pollard is married to the former Kathleen Gillaspie with whom he has three sons: Gary, Dale, and Carl. He began preaching in 1987. He was educated at Faulkner University, Freed-Hardeman University, and Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver (B.A., M.B.S.). He has done local work in Alabama and Virginia. Currently, he is the pulpit minister for the Bear

Valley congregation in Denver, Colorado, where he has served since 2006. Neal also works as a part-time instructor at Bear Valley Bible Institute. He is the author of *Rise Up And Build*. Neal has preached in twenty-five states and seven foreign countries. He directs the Future Preachers Training Camp in Denver and serves as director of the Bear Valley Lectureship.

The disposal process for plutonium and americium waste includes using kitty litter to soak up liquids in a sealed drum, but engineers from the Los Alamos National Laboratory decided to “substitute an organic material for a mineral one.” Subsequently, “the new material caused a complex chemical reaction that blew the lid off a drum, sending mounds of white, radioactive foam into the air and contaminating thirty-five percent of the underground area.” The end result was a cleanup cost of as much as two billion dollars (Vartabedian). So many people involved in this explosion learned a lesson and paid a price from making untried, unproven changes to something that works.

Nothing seems more assaulted in society than God’s pattern for marriage. People continually tinker with what God created—sexual relationships and living together before marriage, divorce, adultery, unscriptural remarriage,

homosexual marriage, open marriage or “swinging,” as well as more subtle, but equally dangerous, situations where the marriage itself is sanctioned by Scripture but the participants build on the sinking sand of something other than the Savior. This is not a twenty-first century phenomenon. A careful study of the New Testament reveals that the first century was plenty plagued with not just sexual sins, but marriages that deviated from the sacred standard.

Peter writes to a church which, like our own today, is commanded to behave counter-culturally in order to have spiritual success. The instruction goes beyond just preparing them to suffer for faithful service to Christ into teaching Christians how to live though sojourners and pilgrims “among the Gentiles” (NKJV, 1 Pet. 2:11-12). This includes what the Christian’s marriage ought to look like. Peter writes,

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. 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. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any



terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet. 3:1-7)

Peter's inspired teaching gives insight into how we, as Christians, can develop marriages that help us go to heaven as the majority heedlessly drifts toward destruction. We will not have marriages destined for heaven just because we marry one who professes to be a Christian. However, if we are married to true Christians who seek to submit to Christ's will for every facet of their lives, we give ourselves the best opportunity to live on the narrow way which leads to eternal life (cf. Mat. 7:13-14). If we are true Christians seeking to submit to His will for all parts of our lives, we give our spouse the same opportunity. Notice three potent principles from this apostle to help us help our mates go to heaven.

### **Give Emphasis To The Spiritual**

The apparent environment for the readers of Peter's first epistle bears strong resemblance to our own in many ways. Peter addresses them from the outset as "pilgrims" (1 Pet. 1:1), ones who are "staying for a while in a strange or foreign place, sojourning, residing temporarily" (Arndt et al. 775). They had to be holy, not conforming themselves to their former lusts (1 Pet. 1:14-16). They were to lay aside carnal actions characterized by the unredeemed (1 Pet. 2:1). They were to proclaim Him to the dark world (1 Pet. 2:10). They were in a position to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by doing good (1 Pet. 2:15). This may have incurred suffering (1 Pet. 2:21-25). This emphasis continues throughout the letter, urging a countercultural strategy in this

sinful world. That included the foundation for marriage. In a godless society, Peter calls for a spiritual emphasis in marriage. As he addresses us, by way of application, the same exact conditions and expectations exist. He gives four areas where we must give emphasis to the spiritual.

***Your Conduct (1 Pet. 3:1-2)***

While these first three areas are addressed to wives and have some unique application to them (especially verses one and five), the principle applies to both spouses. Peter urges spiritual conduct upon the wives, especially women married to non-Christians. Yet, notice that there is particular emphasis upon the conduct. The conduct is **soul-conscious**, winning the spouse (1 Pet. 3:1). She does what she does out of concern for his soul. She wants him won to Christ. The conduct is **chaste** (1 Pet. 3:2). “Chaste” is from the Greek word family of the word “holy,” and some form of the word is found twelve times in this short letter. Here, the word specifically means pure and innocent, without moral defect (Louw 745). This standard of living is not governed by this world, but by a much higher law. The idea is that actions are to be marked by purity and holiness. Peter is about to follow up with an example of chaste conduct (1 Pet. 3:3-5). The conduct is **accompanied by fear** (1 Pet. 3:2). Peter uses this word in such a way that leads us to believe he means fear of God (see similar use in 1 Pet. 1:17; 1 Pet. 2:17-18; 1 Pet. 3:15). If you fear God, you will certainly act the way He commands. All three aspects of her conduct are distinctly spiritual. This is not the way the world does things.

The platform is not the public persona, what people see on social media, at church services, or around other Christians. It is the conduct witnessed in the home or around those in the world. Our spouse is guided by our example. Are we hypocritical? Is our speech pure in some places, but filthy

in others? Is our attitude exalted around the righteous, but base when put to the test in private? What is visible when we let down our hair around our mate? Does it draw admiration and challenge them to greater heights? Does it disappoint and appall? My mate is watching, even when the elders, the preacher, and the good families at church cannot see me.

***Your Clothing (1 Pet. 3:3-5a)***

Peter warns against a materialistic, externally-focused life. His specific example is of a spouse who gives vast attention to her wardrobe rather than her spirit. He urges the opposite. He praises the holy “hidden person of the heart,” who is adorned with the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Most of us have heard the adage, “Putting lipstick on a pig.” The idea is that applying makeup to a barnyard animal does nothing to alter the beast beneath. Being clothed with spiritual qualities helps our mate see Christ better. It hides the world’s influence.

While there is appropriate application to husbands and wives wearing clothing that is modest rather than vulgar and revealing outside the privacy of the home, do not miss the point in context. Adorn yourself with a proper spirit. This will influence one’s mate, and in the process be seen as precious in God’s eyes. Remember, Peter’s words are about winning one’s mate. The same emphasis will help influence a spouse already converted to Christ.

Do we place greater emphasis on our bodies and our possessions? What a tragedy to make the greater investment in what inevitably decays and perishes than in our inward man (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Scripture says be clothed with humility (1 Pet. 5:5), adorn the doctrine of God (Tit. 2:10), and put on the new man (Eph. 4:24). That fits with what Peter urges on wives, and, by extension, husbands, in this verse. For the wife, particularly, she clothes herself with submission to her

own husband. By fulfilling her role, she makes it easier for her husband to follow Christ. Certainly, Peter speaks of the same consequence which follows a husband adorning himself with the spiritual clothing which honors his wife (1 Pet. 3:7). Paul calls it nourishing and cherishing her (cf. Eph. 5:29). We say that people wear their emotions on their sleeves. Peter is saying to wear godliness in every right way, and that will influence your spouse immeasurably.

***Your Capacity (1 Pet. 3:5b-7a)***

One of the best ways to help your spouse go to heaven is to fulfill your role. Here, Peter says that the wife is to submit and obey (1 Pet. 3:5-6) and the husband is to understand and honor (1 Pet. 3:7). It is easy to downplay the love for Christ that causes us to empty ourselves and do what shows deference and unselfishness to our mate. Peter calls it doing good when the wife so trusts God that she trusts her husband's leadership (1 Pet. 3:5-6). Remarkably, she does this because of who she is rather than who her husband is. Remember, by filling her role, she will influence and improve him. Ultimately, she may well win him! The man, by taking time to understand how his wife "ticks," helps her operate at her optimum best. Such focus and esteem will be felt by her and cause her to respond to him not just in favorable ways, but respond to God in a way that leads to her eternal inheritance.

When there is role confusion or when one or both spouses refuse to fill their roles, there is chaos and disorder that forms a massive roadblock to spiritual success. How sad to sit across the table to counsel a couple who are so "me deep" in self, demanding and expecting, that they have no will to humbly submit to their roles in the marriage.

***Your Consecration (1 Pet. 3:7c)***

The specific area targeted by Peter, in this passage, is

prayer. A couple not primarily focused on the spiritual will miss the benefits of a dedicated, devotional life. How do we expect to go to heaven if we are not investing in our private, spiritual lives as a couple? Yes, the husband and wife individually need to strengthen their relationships with Christ, but oh the power that follows in their mutual approach to God in consecration!

How often do we sing, pray, and study together? When have we last sat down and shared Christ with someone? Is our home a hub of spiritual activity, inviting the saved and the lost in for wholesome activity? The more we build our marriage around spiritual works that please and glorify Him, the better we insulate ourselves from worldly pressures and the stronger the spiritual glue we apply to our relationship. Aquila and Priscilla are an incredible example of a couple devoted to teaming together to serve Christ (Acts 18; Rom. 16; etc.).

It truly is that simple. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mat. 6:33). Far more than just material concerns, a kingdom-first mentality helps place the proper emphasis on our marriages.

### **Give Honor To Your Spouse**

Peter speaks to the husband in 1 Peter 3:7, and he speaks of him giving “honor” to the wife. That is a powerful word in this brief epistle. It means “the amount at which something is valued” (Arndt 1005). Notice how the word is used throughout the epistle, a total of nine occurrences. Jesus is called a cornerstone considered “precious” to God (2:4, 6). The tested faith of the recipients of this letter is called “more precious” (very valuable) (1 Pet. 1:7). It was worth more than precious metals that perish. Peter calls for the Christians to “honor” all people and the king (1 Pet. 2:17). This

challenging command is to value these people for the very positions they occupy. The exact word used in 1 Peter 3:7 is also found in 1 Peter 1:7, where our faith will be held in honor by Christ at His appearing, and 1 Peter 2:7, where Jesus is seen as precious to us all the while He is disdained and worthless to those who are disobedient. Finally, the word is applied to the blood of Jesus in 1 Peter 1:19, precious enough to redeem us from sin. **That** is valuable! All of these are a form of this word in 1 Peter 3:7. Each speaks to how prized the object is.

Husbands, what is your opinion of your wife? Do you ignore her, take her for granted, merely tolerate her, or consider her a cross you have to bear? If so, you are disobeying the divine directive laid down by Peter in this passage. In so doing, you are likely putting your soul as well as hers in jeopardy. On the other hand, if she is precious to you, if you are dedicated to honoring her, and you place a higher value on her than on your occupation, your hobbies, your toys, your bank account, your buddies, your family, and the like, it is as if you are picking her up in your arms and helping to carry her through the narrow gate. How pitiful to see a man who scorns, ridicules, and talks down to his wife. How impressive and touching to see a man full of chivalry and obvious delight in the wife of his youth!

Ladies, the principle is equally applicable to you. Paul says that young women should be taught to love their husbands (Tit. 2:4). As you esteem your husband in the same way discussed above, you produce the same results in him and for yourself.

### **Give Thought To Your Station**

By the time Peter gets to verse seven, he is no longer discussing a Christian wife with a non-Christian husband. Peter's directive in this verse is aimed at a Christian man. As

the husband takes time to understand his wife, honors her, and prays with her, he shows comprehension of an exciting fact. They are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Jesus makes it clear that the marriage relationship on this earth is **not** carried into eternity. He tells the Sadducees, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Mat. 22:30). However, on this earth, God provides for us through marriage an intimate, encouraging relationship that He wishes to use to help each of us get to heaven. Isn’t it exciting to wake up each day knowing that you and your spouse are on the way to heaven? As you walk in the light (1 John 1:7) and spur each other on, you are fulfilling the specified requirements of the One who will give you your inheritance in the end (Eph. 1:11).

Before you turn on the television, remember your position as heirs of heaven. As you choose your recreation, remember that. When deciding which people you will allow into your circle of influence, consider this. In your attitude toward Bible study, give thought to it. In short, let your life revolve around an awareness of the fleeting nature of this life and the endless nature of the next. Some have their identities wrapped up in their looks, their things, their political affiliation, and such. Whatever else the Christian couple has going on, God wants them most focused on who they are and where they are going. As Robert Brault once said, “There comes a time when a man and woman realize that their separate schemes can be better achieved as a conspiracy.” You are heirs **together**, by God’s design.

### **Conclusion**

Too many marriages are a tug of war—each fighting the other’s individual attempts to improve and be what God wants them to be. Some marriages are more akin to sabotage

where the actions of one spouse create stumbling blocks that make going to heaven very difficult. Successful marriages occur when husbands and wives form a bond, an intimate camaraderie borne of their mutual understanding of each other and mutual need for one another to successfully navigate the landmines of this world. The latter marriages are the kind depicted by Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-7. May we strive to build more marriages like these and thereby reach a world in desperate need of that kind of influence.

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## Do The Righteous Go To Heaven Or Paradise When They Die?

*Billy Bland*



Billy Bland was born and raised in Oxford, Mississippi. He is married to the former Terry Collums, and together they have two children and three granddaughters. Billy served in the United States Army before attending Memphis School of Preaching. He also earned a graduate diploma from Memphis School of Preaching as well as B.A and M.A. degrees from Amridge University. Billy has done local work in Tennessee and Mississippi. Currently, he is the associate director of the Memphis School of Preaching, an elder at the Coldwater congregation, and chairman of the board of Four Seas College of the Bible and Missions in Singapore.

### Introduction

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (KJV, Gen. 1:26-27). Since man is created in God’s image, he has a soul that exists eternally. Zechariah informs us God forms the spirit within man. “The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zec. 12:1). At death, the body goes back to the dust (awaiting the resurrection, John 5:28-29), but the spirit unto God Who gave it. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” (Ecc. 12:7).

Mankind is concerned with his life while on the earth as well as life after death. Job asked, “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come” (Job 14:14). Our death occurs when our spirits move out of our bodies. James explained, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam. 2:26). Illustrations of what James said are seen in both the Old and the New Testaments. The Bible says, “And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin” (Gen. 35:18). Rachel’s soul departed from her body, consequently her body died. Tabitha (also known as Dorcas) died and her body was placed in an upper chamber. Again, the Bible says, “Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (Acts 9:39). Dorcas’ body was present but she was not there. Her spirit had moved out of her body. Even though the body dies, the spirit continues to live. But what happens to the spirit? Where does it go? Does it go into hades or directly into heaven?

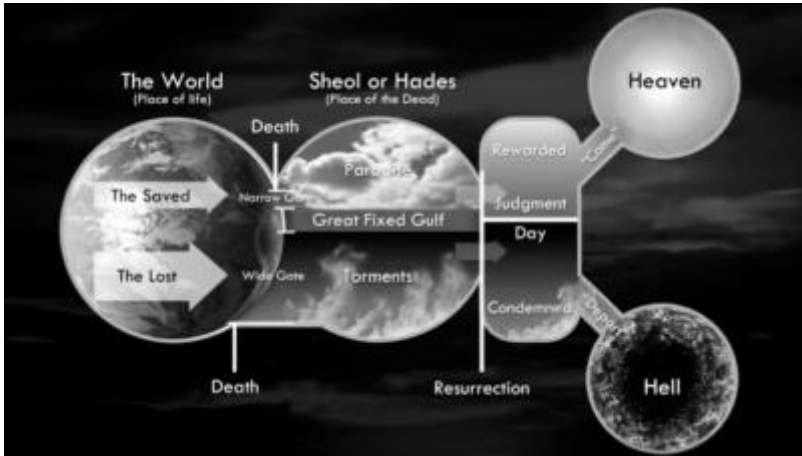
The Bible teaches that when a person dies, his soul goes into the hadean realm until the day of judgment, at which time he will enter into heaven or hell (Mat. 25:46). At the time of death, the righteous souls go into the hadean realm into a place called “paradise” (Luke 23:43). The souls of the wicked go into the hadean realm into a place referred to as “tartarus” (2 Pet. 2:4). Some teach this was the case prior to the ascension of Jesus Christ. But they argue since Jesus’ ascension back into heaven, the righteous spirits now go directly into heaven and the wicked into hell. Guy N. Woods succinctly explained,

(1) Death is the condition subsisting when the spirit is no longer in the body; (2) at death, the body returns to the dust; (3) the spirit enters a realm designated as Hades (from “a” negative; and “eidoo,” to see, thus literally, the unseen); (4) righteous spirits occupy a position in Hades variously denominated paradise or Abraham's bosom; (5) wicked spirits are restrained in tartarus, a position or place in Hades, set off from paradise or Abraham's bosom, by an impassable gulf. (James 2:26; Eccles. 12:7; Acts 2:27; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Pet. 2:4). There are those who concede the correctness of these conclusions in the period prior to the resurrection of Christ, but who maintain that on the occasion of the Lord's ascension, the paradise realm of...Hades and all of its occupants—the saints of the former dispensations—were moved to heaven, since which time all righteous spirits enter at death upon their final reward in heaven. (Q and A)

In this section, Biblical evidence will be given to show that the souls of the righteous go to paradise awaiting the resurrection of the body at which time they will face the judgment and then go into heaven. Then attention will be given stating the arguments some present for the position that the souls of the righteous go directly into heaven, and last those arguments will be answered.

### Souls Of The Righteous Enter Paradise

The chart below (see fig. 1) explains the journey of the soul from the time it is saved or lost until its final eternal destination.



(Fig. 1)

When one is born into this world, he is in a safe condition. He is not born a sinner but rather is pure since his spirit came directly from God (Acts 17:29, Zec. 12:1). One does not inherit the sins of his parents (Eze. 18:20). Jesus used a child as an illustration of what one must become to enter into the kingdom of heaven: “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 18:3). As one reaches the age of accountability and sins, he is then a sinner and is in need of being saved. When he hears the Gospel (Rom. 10:17), believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24), repents of his sins (Luke 13:3), confesses his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37), and is baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38), he leaves his lost

condition and is now saved from his past sins. If he fails to obey the Gospel and dies in his lost condition, he enters into the hadean realm described as torment or anguish. “And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame” (ASV, Luke 16:23-24). However, if he obeys the Gospel prior to dying physically, at death his soul enters into the hadean realm described as paradise. “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43, also referred as Abraham’s bosom, cf. Luke 16:23). When the judgment day occurs, the bodies of both the righteous and the unrighteous will be resurrected (cf. John 5:28-29, 1 The. 4:13-18), and each soul will enter its final destination. The saved will enter into heaven and the lost will enter into hell (Mat. 25:46).

### **Arguments Affirming Spirits Go Directly To Heaven**

Guy N. Woods observed, “Among the writers of the Restoration Movement, F. G. Allen, of Old Path Pulpit fame, pioneered and defended this position. The ablest men among us, however, have always rejected Allen's position” (Q and A). Brother Woods then listed some of the arguments from Allen for this position:

- **Argument 1.** “Stephen bade Jesus receive his spirit, from which it is assumed that the first martyr expected to go where Jesus is, i.e., to heaven.”
- **Argument 2.** “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; hence, to be in heaven. Paul was caught up to the “third heaven;” the “third heaven” is assumed to be the final abode of the righteous; the apostle was also caught up to paradise;

paradise is, therefore, the “third heaven,” the final home of the righteous (2 Cor. 12:1ff).”

- **Argument 3.** “There was no absolute forgiveness of sins under earlier dispensations, hence it was not possible to go to heaven prior to the death of Christ; since that event, this disability has been removed.”
- **Argument 4.** “Christ, our High Priest, opened up the veil of the temple, thus making a way into the holiest manifest. The Lord destroyed him who had power over death—the devil and delivered them “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,” from which it is assumed that (a) the deliverance of this passage was the bearing away of the souls of the righteous in Hades to heaven! (Heb. 2:14-15)” (ibid).

**Argument 5.** In addition to the above arguments by Allen, this writer has heard the argument made that the whole family of God is on earth and heaven: “Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:15). It is assumed that since Paul said the “whole family of God is on earth and heaven,” then there were no children of God in paradise when Paul wrote the book of Ephesians.

### **The Arguments Answered**

Guy N. Woods answered F. G. Allen’s arguments. He observed,

**Arguments 1 and 2** fall short of the claim made for them, because (a) they ignore the omnipresence of the Lord; and (b) the same difficulty faces those who concede that the righteous did not go directly to heaven before the death of Christ. Solomon said that at death the spirit returns to God who

gave it (Eccles. 12:7); when, therefore, it is explained how the spirit can go to God who gave it, yet not be in heaven, the same explanation will suffice for the case of Stephen and Paul. To be with the Lord is to be in his care and keeping; and the place designed for this is between death and the resurrection, the realm of paradise or Abraham's bosom. Those in this realm are with the Lord; it does not, however, follow that they are in heaven. (ibid)

Brother Woods further noted,

The contention that the “third heaven,” in 2 Cor. 12:1ff, is styled paradise proves that under the Christian dispensation the paradise of the Hadean world has been moved to heaven is far from conclusive. True, heaven is a paradise, but not every paradise is heaven. Heaven is a city; Memphis is a city; shall we thence conclude therefore that Memphis is heaven? The word “paradise,” originally a Persian garden, and then figuratively a place of blessing, is descriptive of heaven, because heaven is such a place; it does not, however, follow that every place of blessing is heaven...(ibid)

### **Argument 3.**

It is true that there was no absolute forgiveness of sins under former

dispensations; and our Lord did indeed make manifest a way into the most holy place; but Brother Allen's conclusion which he draws from these premises is an Ignoratio Elenchi, a misapprehension of the question. The facts stated do not have any necessary connection with the proposition to be proved, and thus the conclusion which he draws does not follow. (ibid)

#### **Argument 4.**

a) The word destroy in this passage (katargeoo) does not mean to annihilate, but to bring to naught. This the Lord did by perfecting and executing a plan by which to deliver man from the power and dominion of the devil. (b) This passage must not be interpreted to mean that all men will be delivered from bondage, but only such as are willing to avail themselves of the means provided. (c) Those who feared death are men who dread the pain, the misery, and the dissolution which attends it, and the uncertainty which follows it. (d) Those thus delivered are men who were all of their lifetime subject to bondage (enochoi dou lias), bondslaves, “Used of the slavish sense of fear, devoid alike of buoyancy of spirit and of trust in God, such as is produced by the thought of death.” (Thayer, on Heb. 2:15). It follows, therefore, that (1) the deliverance



contemplated in this passage is that which Christ accomplishes through the gospel; (2) the bondage from which these men were delivered included the fear of death and its consequences; (3) the bondage which they experienced was during their lifetime, and not after they had died and were in the spirit world! It will therefore be seen that Heb. 2:14, 15, rightly interpreted, has no bearing on the question whatsoever. (ibid)

**Argument 5.** “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:14-15). The whole family is named after the Father. The word “heaven” in Ephesians 3:15 carries the idea “the heights above, the upper regions” (Thayer). While it can refer to where God dwells (cf. Mat. 7:11), it can also refer to regions where the birds fly (Mat. 8:20). “Heaven” in this context includes paradise.

### **Additional Proofs That The Righteous Souls Go To Paradise**

Concerning the Christ, David prophesied that His soul would not be left in hell, neither would His flesh see corruption (cf. Psa. 16:8-11). In Acts 2, the apostle Peter quotes this prophecy and applies it to Jesus Christ. He said,

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his

loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. (Acts 2:29-35)

One will notice that Peter said David had not ascended into the heavens. Yet, this was after Christ's ascension back into heaven. The passage is not just about the body, but it encompasses both body and spirit. David's body did see corruption and his soul is in hades. Also, the apostle John affirmed that no man has seen God at any time. "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12). John wrote this statement long after Jesus' ascension back into heaven, yet no man had seen God. In heaven, however, we will see God (Rev. 22:4). Consequently, no man has yet ascended into heaven.

If people were already in the final state of eternity, why would there be a need for the resurrection? The Bible teaches that when Jesus returns he will bring the saints with him and their bodies will be resurrected and they along with the living will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and shall forever be with the Lord (cf. 1 The. 4:13-17).

The apostle Paul knew that he would receive his reward the same time others would receive their reward “at that day.” “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).

### **Conclusion**

There is great interest in the topic of where we go when we die. Fortunately, God in His Word gives us light on the subject. We can know we are saved and where we will be eternally. “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). Our ultimate hope is heaven. At death, the souls of the righteous enter into paradise where they are comforted. Robert R. Taylor, Jr. observed,

Death is not the final stage of human existence. The body dies; the spirit or soul lives on. Jesus assured the scoffing, skeptical Sadducees that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived (Mat. 22:32)..[sic] Their souls or spirits had not been buried in the cave of Machpelah in southern Palestine. Contrary to the popular thinking of many, even among us, the souls of the righteous do not go to heaven at death; the souls of the wicked to [sic] not go directly to eternal gehenna at death. There is a place for all souls to go at death—Hades. It has a realm for the wicked, it has a realm for the

righteous (Luke 16:19-31). (521)

May each of us obey the Gospel and live for Him who died for us. By so doing, we will be blessed at death and eternally.

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# Keys To Understanding The Book Of Revelation

*Cliff Goodwin*



Cliff and his wife, Beth (Williams), are native Alabamians. They are blessed with a son, Cade (16), and two daughters: Kinley (15) and Lakelyn (12). Cliff is a graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and Faulkner University. Over the last twenty years he has labored with the Ironaton church of Christ located outside of Talladega, Alabama. During this time he has done extensive television evangelism—initially in the local market and recently on *Gospel Broadcasting Network (GBN)*. As of 2012, Cliff is the host of *Searching the Scriptures* and *Preaching the Gospel*—both of which can be seen on GBN.

All Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for man’s spiritual equipping (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This is as true of the last book of the Bible as it is of the first. Yet many Bible students neglect the book of Revelation in their personal studies. Its symbols are strange and, at times, perhaps even frightening. Many would-be students of the Apocalypse have convinced themselves that a proper understanding of the book is simply beyond their reach.

This author believes that such a negative conclusion is both hasty and incorrect. It would not befit the wisdom and power of God, if He were to reveal an inspired book that proved completely useless to man. Instead, God has revealed His Word in a format that man can read, study and ultimately understand. Paul’s inspired words are especially helpful along these lines. “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)” (KJV, Eph. 3:3-4).

This is not to say that all of the Word of God is understood with the same amount of study and effort. Even the apostle Peter himself noted that some Scriptures are more difficult to understand than others.

And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Pet. 3:15-16)

One must be careful to note, however, the distinction between something's being "hard" to understand and something's being "impossible" to understand. Even the difficult passages of Scripture can be understood through the necessary diligence. Such study often comes over time and is accompanied by a growth in spiritual maturity. Obviously a babe in Christ is not going to possess the same knowledge and grasp of the Scriptures as a seasoned, mature child of God.

Peter's inspired words above also send out a clear warning. It is often the difficult texts of Scripture that are "wrested," or twisted, by those who espouse doctrinal error. Scripture is ever to be revered, and it must never be reduced to one's own "plaything" or novelty—something to be misused and exploited as one might see fit. God's Word has meaning, and it is the meaning that God intended when He revealed it to man. It is man's duty to exert the necessary diligence and study in order to interpret (understand) God's

Word accurately. This must be done honestly, with the sincere desire to be approved by God. “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).

If ever a difficult text of Scripture had been twisted and misused, it would be the book of Revelation. Sadly, this book of the Bible has become the “plaything” of so many sensationalists who fascinate, dupe, and exploit the masses. They shall bear their own guilt and suffer their own condemnation (cf. Rev. 22:18-19). Nonetheless, one extreme must not beget another. The fact that so many twist and abuse the Apocalypse must not be used as an excuse for one to ignore and neglect the book altogether. As its most familiar name suggests, the book of Revelation was **revealed** that it might be known and understood by man. In fact, the Bible would be incomplete without this amazing book. Revelation is the “capstone” of God’s Word, revealing for all time that history is ever pressing to a definite finish: the judgment of the Almighty and the victory of good over evil. In every generation, God’s children must be aware and must be reminded of this fundamental truth!

### **Key #1: Properly Equip Your Mind**

As with any serious undertaking, having the proper attitude is paramount. This first key to understanding the book of Revelation pertains to attitude. The honest student must approach the book **expecting** to understand it. Obviously no one is going to know everything there is to know about the book (or any other book of the Bible for that matter). Nonetheless, the diligent student can come away with a firm mental grasp on the thrust of the book and with a good working knowledge of its contents. “While there may be considerable difficulty in interpreting some of the symbols in

this inspired treatise, countless practical lessons are easily discernible” (Jackson 27). Another author counseled, “Remember that one can get the main point of the prophecy of Revelation without being dogmatic about every detail of its interpretation. Some of the symbols are heavy and obscure; the message is clear and plain” (Shelly 15).

In the Greek text of Revelation, the first word is *apokalupsis*, meaning “an uncovering of something.” Both the name Revelation and the name Apocalypse come from this initial word. One should note that the book was revealed to John and ultimately written down by him, in order that information might be uncovered, or made known. How strange, indeed, that many view Revelation as material that is hopelessly closed, while God intended it to be an “unveiling”!

Thayer defined *apokalupsis* first as “laying bare, making naked.” As a second definition he added “a disclosure of truth, instruction.” It is apparent that the book of Revelation itself discloses truth that was initially intended for Christians of the first century. God would not have revealed this disclosure in a format completely beyond the mental grasp of man. Such a “disclosure” would not be a disclosure at all! “God did not include this book in Holy Scripture to confuse and mystify his people. It is there *to reveal* rather than hide, *to be understood* rather than avoided” (Shelly 9).

Two of the beatitudes contained in Revelation should encourage the would-be student to approach the book optimistically. The first is found in Revelation 1:3, “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.” It is interesting to note the shift from the singular to the plural in this verse. “He that readeth” gives way to “they that hear.” The inspired John most likely makes this shift because of a practice common in the churches



(congregations) of his day. "...[I]t was the practice of the churches of our Lord in the first and second centuries to assemble and hear the word of God read publicly to them. Today, a preacher often selects a text and preaches from it, but in New Testament times a reader read an entire book in the assembly and then made comment on the book" (West 25-26). One notes, however, that the blessing was not pronounced on those who merely read or heard the words of Revelation. The blessing would only accompany the **keeping** of those things which are written. Obedience was and is required, and obviously obedience necessitates a degree of understanding.

The second beatitude that implies the understandability of Revelation now follows. "Behold, I come quickly: blessed *is* he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev. 22:7). If the contents of the Apocalypse were completely indiscernible, then readers both ancient and modern would be at a loss regarding this beatitude. How can one "keep" that which is totally beyond the limits of his own understanding? There is no doubt that the Lord intended the initial recipients of Revelation to understand the book's message and to keep it (i.e., to observe its teachings accordingly in their lives). The same is possible for modern students as well, so long as the book is considered in light of its first-century context. More will be stated concerning this consideration later in this work.

The book of Revelation can be successfully understood—even by those living in modern times. The first key to an accurate understanding, however, is having the proper attitude. The honest student should approach the book with the expectation of understanding it. God provided the book as an "unveiling," and He expects its message to be understood. One whose mind is equipped with this attitude,

along with humility and willing diligence, is well on his way to understanding the book of Revelation.

### **Key #2: Properly Equip Your Feet**

This present point is likely unexpected by the reader. What do my *feet* have to do with my understanding the book of Revelation?! The answer is “a great deal,” actually, so long as one is speaking in metaphorical terms. The successful student of Revelation must **put himself in the shoes** of the first-century recipients. Though the book has been Providentially preserved for us, it had a specific audience when it was first given. Notice how the apostle John addressed the book, “John to the seven churches which are in Asia” (Rev. 1:4). This is because the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared to John in a “preparatory vision” with these words of instruction.

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. (Rev. 1:11)

There were definitely other congregations in existence at that time, but the Revelation is particularly addressed to these seven in provincial Asia. Seven churches were likely chosen because of the symbolic significance attached to this number throughout Revelation and throughout the Bible. In Biblical symbolism, the number seven represents completeness, and thus, these seven churches would likely represent the completeness of what needed to be dealt with, or addressed,

for all time (Cates). In the words of another author, “These seven churches are selected most likely because they are representative of the problems and challenges facing the body of Christ as a whole—both then and now” (Jackson 28).

The importance of putting oneself in the shoes of these first-century Christians is brought to the forefront in Revelation 1:9, “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.” When John identified himself as their “companion in tribulation,” he implied that these Christians were suffering themselves (or soon would be). The suffering of God’s faithful servants (cf. Rev. 1:1) is an integral part of Revelation’s historical backdrop. It often comes through explicitly in the “mini-epistles” of chapters two and three. Those in Smyrna were already experiencing tribulation and poverty, but their sufferings were soon going to intensify (Rev. 2:9-10). A brother in Pergamos had already suffered martyrdom as a faithful disciple of Jesus (Rev. 2:13). Apparently, the church of Christ at Philadelphia had already been antagonized by unbelieving Jews in their area (Rev. 3:9).

Continuing throughout the book of Revelation, it is evident that God’s faithful people have suffered, are suffering or will be suffering.

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)

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:13-14)

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 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. 12:10-11)

The modern student of the Apocalypse must put himself in the shoes of these first-century readers. This will prove quite difficult for those who are blessed to live in nations where Christianity does not currently face governmental persecution.

Years prior to John's receiving the Revelation, the apostle Peter had written to the Christians in Asia (1 Pet. 1:1-2). Even then they were already suffering (1 Pet. 1:6-7), but the apostle Peter seems to have warned them that their trials

were going to escalate (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-19). Before the end of that very century, their trials of persecution did that very thing. This is why Revelation was written. Under the emperor Domitian, Christians would be persecuted throughout the provinces—including Asia. The persecution would be terribly harsh and cruel. Persecuted Christians living under such conditions had to be asking themselves, “What’s going to happen? What will the end result be of all this suffering and hostility?” The book of Revelation is the uncovering of the answer. “Revelation is an assurance that God’s way of truth and righteousness will triumph over all its foes” (Shelly 14). The last book of the New Testament will be especially cherished in every generation by those who are persecuted for their faith.

### **Key #3: Properly Equip Your Eyes**

The late W.B. West, Jr. would often insist that his pupils study the book of Revelation “through first-century glasses” (17). In other words, the last book of the New Testament was not written in a historical vacuum. There were definite historical circumstances that prompted John’s inspired writing and that necessitated such a treatise for the initial recipients. The task is the same for the student of Revelation as it is with every student of any New Testament book. One must carefully discern what the author had in mind as he wrote the book, and then he must likewise discern what that communication meant to the initial addressees. This approach applies to the Revelation as much as it does to any epistle of Paul. In this way the careful New Testament student will be looking “through first-century glasses.”

#### ***Historical Context***

Imperial Rome ruled the Mediterranean world of the first century. Because the empire was so expansive, taking in a great variety of peoples, national cohesiveness and

solidarity were pressing concerns to the emperors. “Although Rome was a mighty empire, it was a very divided one. Many attempted to unite it, but none was successful until Rome declared the empire to be divine and its emperor also divine, being Lord and God” (West 17). This policy obviously headed the empire into a head-on collision with the church of Christ. Emperor worship was no more than idolatry, and no conscientious Christian could have practiced idolatry.

This situation would reach its crisis point during the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96). “Not content to wait until death for the senate to confer deity upon him, he proclaimed himself *dominus et deus* (Latin, ‘Lord and God’) and required worship from his subjects” (Shelly 10). This matter was pressed far beyond the city of Rome itself, even into the provinces. Thus, it affected God’s people in Asia and throughout the empire.

One must remember the historical context of Revelation as he studies the book. Properly understood, the book could aptly be subtitled “God’s Message of Hope for Suffering Saints.” If the major thrust of the book is neglected or overlooked, however, the door is left ajar for all manner of speculative, fanciful and even dangerous interpretations. “One cannot expect to understand Revelation divorced from [its historical context, C.G.]. Christians were facing the grim ordeal of persecution, and this book was given them to reveal ‘the things which must shortly come to pass’ (Rev. 1:1)” (Shelly 12). Such a statement in the opening verse of the book ties its interpretation to the first century and times following. “This opposes the approach of many would-be exegetes of the book who see it as concerned almost entirely with the future, even near to the end of the world, involving a rapture, an earthly reign of Christ, the battle of Armageddon ad infinitum” (West 21).

This is **not** to say, however, that all the contents of Revelation have transpired or been fulfilled already. Many conservative commentators understand the closing chapters of the book (especially chapters twenty-one and twenty-two) to pertain to eschatological matters. This is certainly possible, and it poses no threat of contradiction whatsoever to John's inspired statement of "must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). This is because such a statement *in prophetic literature* (cf. Rev. 1:3; Rev. 22:10; Rev. 22:18-19) is **not** always limited to the sense of time, but often denotes certainty (Jackson 135-139). One can examine other similar usages of this Greek term in Luke 18:8 and Romans 16:20. It is true that God's timetable is often very different from man's, and one would do well to remember this when looking through the "telescope" of prophecy (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). These things being said, the most reasonable explanation is that the *beginning* of these events was near when John wrote of them by inspiration. Revelation is a book written first and foremost to suffering saints near the close of the first century. As long as one keeps on his "first-century glasses," he should be able to glean the applications available to saints of all time.

### ***Apocalyptic Language***

As noted earlier, the first word in the Greek text of Revelation is *apokalupsis*. This is a helpful reminder concerning the genre of literature found in the book. Apocalyptic literature was intended to reveal, or uncover, information that would encourage and benefit the recipients, but it did so through the use of symbols, or signs. Thus, the message of Revelation itself is an unveiling—showing the suffering saints the ultimate outcome of their struggle—but the actual communication of this message was conveyed through symbols. John informs his readers of this approach in the opening verse of the book. "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 added, C.G.). The root of the English word *signified* is the word *sign*—which is also another word for *symbol*. The book was revealed to John in a series of visions which contained dramatic signs, or symbols. This was characteristic of the apocalyptic literature that was well-known to Jews living roughly from 200 BC to AD 100. Being a Jew, the apostle John would have been familiar with this genre, no doubt, and God inspired him to write the capstone of the Bible in this literary format.

It might seem strange to the modern mind that God would unveil much-needed truth through the medium of symbols instead of straightforward narrative or prose. There are a number of reasons, however, why the all-knowing God would do so. First, apocalyptic literature was generally written during dark times—times of suffering and even persecution. This was true of Ezekiel and Daniel’s time (Old Testament examples of apocalyptic literature), and it was certainly true of John’s time near the close of the first century. Since God’s people were already suffering when such writings were precipitated, there was wisdom in writing these messages in symbolic wording. Their sufferings might have been intensified if clear and straightforward writings had fallen into the hands of the enemy. So, apocalyptic literature was “used in part to disguise the divine prophecies from the enemy, who might try to interrupt and upset their fulfillment and purpose, the symbols and signs were still understandable to God’s people...” (Cates).

Another reason for the use of apocalyptic literature is the indelible and encouraging impression left on the readers’ hearts by the dramatic imagery. Again, this type literature was



normally used during dark times for God's people. The saints needed strengthening and encouragement. Though couched in signs and symbols, the major thrust of God's message was crystal clear to His people. Even further, the graphic images in apocalyptic literature served to "drive home" that very message, making it real and vivid (Cates). God always knows what is best for His people, and He always knows how to deliver it!

### **Concluding Remarks**

Revelation can be understood because it is an inspired message from God. Nonetheless, honesty, humility, and diligence are all crucial factors when it comes to one's understanding the Bible. This is certainly true for the book of Revelation. Homer Hailey suggests the following three basic rules as an aid to one's studying the Apocalypse (52-53). One needs to know:

1. "What did the book mean to the people of that day to whom it was written? Any interpretation that omits or overlooks this point is invalid."
2. "A second help is an understanding of the Old Testament, particularly the prophets and especially the prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah."
3. "A third rule is that all interpretations must be consistent and harmonious with the total teaching of the remainder of the New Testament. There must be no conflict or contradiction between the two."

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## The Parable Of The Talents

*Ben Wright*



Ben Wright has been married to the former Jincy Reeves for nineteen years. Together they have three children: Braden, Blake, and Jenna. He preaches for the West Walker congregation outside of Carbon Hill, Alabama, and has been there for sixteen years. He is a graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching and Amridge University. He has done mission work throughout the southeastern United States and in Murmansk, Russia. Ben has spoken on several lectureships and in gospel meetings, has contributed a chapter in two different books, and has been on the writing staff of various brotherhood publications.

The Southaven congregation has long held a dear place in my heart. Having grown up in the Memphis area, this good congregation was well known to me. The works of the congregation were well known, as were her preachers. The Power Lectureship was an event that was not to be missed. The work of GBN is also very special to me. The West Walker congregation has long been a supporter of this great work. So, it is a double pleasure for me to be a part of this lectureship.

The theme of this lectureship is very timely. There is so much discussion about the end of time and things have gone on that many are attributing to some sign of time ending. Sadly, many of those who speak and preach about the end of time have tragically twisted, manipulated, and abused plain passages of Scripture. They do this to their own destruction, but also this results in the further separation of their hearers from the truths of Scripture about this subject.

The end of time has long been on the minds of men. It is believed that 1 Thessalonians is the first inspired writing of

the New Testament, chronologically speaking. In it, Paul was inspired to write about the end of time because the brethren were confused about it. Nothing has changed. Men are still concerned with and hold erroneous thoughts about the end of time. The false doctrine of Premillennialism has done much to perpetuate those concerns and erroneous thoughts.

Time, one day, will definitely end. Paul stated, “Then cometh the end” (KJV, 1 Cor. 15:24). Our Lord, on several occasions took the time to warn His disciples, and us, to be ready for His return. Matthew 24 deals with two topics, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time (Mat. 24:3). We do not know when the return of Jesus will come, but it is coming one day (Mat. 24:36).

Though time may not end during our lifetimes, we all know death will occur (Heb. 9:27). This is a fact no one can deny and a fate no one can escape. Death occurs to all and is no respecter of persons. Death comes to old and young, rich and poor, and is color blind.

Possessing the knowledge of these two facts, time will end or death will occur, should cause us to give the utmost attention for being ready for either event to occur in our lives. The word “ready” is found numerous times in the New Testament. Jesus said, “Therefore be ye also ready” (Mat. 24:44). The Greek word translated “ready” is found fifteen times in the New Testament according to Strong’s (Strong 828). The meaning of it is simply “prepared” (Strong 32). Since either death or the end of time will occur for each of us, we must be prepared and our Lord encouraged us to be such.

To be prepared for death or the return of Christ, numerous things must be given our attention. For our purposes, we are going to focus on being prepared by using the abilities with which God has blessed us. This is the purpose of the parable under consideration.

Parables are wonderful teaching tools used by the Master Teacher, Jesus. Someone said a long time ago that a parable is a heavenly story with an earthly meaning. Our Lord easily used this teaching tool to drive home point after point. In the text under consideration, the point that Jesus was driving home is the need of each of us to be found having used our talents when the judgment occurs.

### **The Position Of The Parable**

The teaching of Jesus recorded in Matthew 25 is all about the need to be ready for the return of Jesus and the judgment that will take place when He does return. Matthew 25 is very much tied to what our Lord taught that is recorded in Matthew 24. As one writer stated, “The two parables and the Final Judgment scene of this chapter are inexorably linked to the Lord’s thoughts in the previous chapter” (Bright 303). The first parable recorded is that of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five of whom were foolish (Mat. 25:1-13). The point of this parable is to teach watchfulness and preparedness (Hearn). The five wise virgins kept enough oil on hand to be ready for the bridegroom, while the five foolish virgins did not. Thus, when the bridegroom finally appeared, the five foolish virgins were unprepared and missed out on the festivities.

The parable of the talents follows the parable of the virgins. The parable of the talents is teaching us what we must be doing to be ready for the return of the Savior. Immediately following the parable of the talents is a picture of the judgment scene. In it, “the people are looking back on the work done or left undone” (Hearn). The sheep simply did what they could do, while the goats left things undone that they could have easily accomplished.

What is found in the text of Matthew 25 is the need to be ready, how to be ready, and what will happen to both the

ready and the unready at the judgment.

### **The Parts Of The Parable**

When studying parables, it is important to have a grasp of what the various parts of the parable may represent. There is a temptation to make everything in a parable represent something. In making this mistake we can miss the plain meaning of the parable. The parable of the talents is very straightforward in what the parts represent.

There is a man who was going on a journey into a far country. This man represents the Lord, who would ascend into heaven, which is the far country, after His resurrection. There are servants who represent Christians. The Lord often referred to His disciples as His servants (Luke 17:10; John 18:36). Christians are frequently referred to as servants of Christ by the inspired penman of the New Testament (Eph. 6:6; Rev. 1:1).

The talents given to the servants represent the abilities with which we have been blessed by God. A talent was a piece of money that was worth several years' wages to the servants. This value shows us the value God places on our abilities He has given us.

There is a return of the lord of the servants. This is the second coming of Jesus.

There is a reckoning with the lord of the servants. This is the judgment scene. Each servant was called before his lord and had to give an account of what he had done with the goods with which he had been entrusted.

There was a reward for having been faithful with the goods placed in one's possession. This represents the faithful Christian being rewarded with heaven.

There was a punishment for having been unfaithful with the goods placed in one's possession. This represents the unfaithful child of God being punished with eternal

damnation.

The parts of the parable are very straightforward. One would have to help to misunderstand what our Lord was teaching on this occasion.

### **The Promises Of The Parable**

This parable is powerful in what it promises us. One of the things that is amazing about the teaching of our Lord and the text of the New Testament itself is that Jesus never wasted words. Each word was powerful, pointed, and necessary. This parable takes up seventeen verses. This is a small amount of space. This parable takes under two minutes to read. This is a small amount of time. However, the teaching of this parable is so rich and deep that space and time do not afford us the ability to adequately address this masterful picture.

#### ***There Is A Promise Of Being Given Abilities By God***

The lord of the servants, who represents Jesus, gave to each servant “according to his several ability” (Mat. 25:15). There is no doubt that every person has some type of ability or abilities given us by God. Each of us is unique and God made us that way. Not everyone is blessed with the ability to lead singing, get up in front of people and speak, or whatever ability it may be.

Paul wrote about this very fact in 1 Corinthians 12. Notice what he was inspired to write:

For the body is not one member, but many.  
If the foot shall say, Because I am not the  
hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore  
not of the body? And if the ear shall say,  
Because I am not the eye, I am not of the  
body; is it therefore not of the body? If the  
whole body were an eye, where were the

hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling? But now God hath set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him (1 Cor. 12:14-18).

Paul was letting them know that not everyone in the church has the same abilities. Some were able, in that context, to perform certain kinds of miracles and other members were able to speak in tongues or something else. Just because a member of the congregation could not speak in an unlearned foreign language did not mean the member was useless or any less of a Christian than another member that could.

Now, in our age, when there are no miraculous abilities, there are still abilities that are possessed by some and not others. Some can sing, some can write, some can teach. One is no more important than the other but all are necessary and we must figure out where our abilities lie and put them to use.

### ***The Lord Is Going To Return One Day***

“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh” (Mat. 25:19). The lord of the servants did not tell them when he was going to return. He delivered to the servants his goods, gave them the talents according to their ability to deal with them, and went on his journey. It was a long time later, but he did return.

This promises to us that the Lord is going to return one day. There is coming an end. This is something Jesus taught (Mat. 24:42). This is something the writers of the New Testament taught as well. Paul wrote, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven” (2 The. 1:7). Also, “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are



asleep” (1 The. 4:15). We know Jesus had come to earth and gone back to heaven by the time Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians. This must be a reference to His return then. Peter wrote, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:4).

There is no doubt that the Lord is going to return one day. It will not be to set up a kingdom on earth because the earth is going to be gone (2 Pet. 3:10). It will be to take His kingdom to present it to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

### ***The Lord Is Going To Judge Us***

When the lord of the servants came back, he settled accounts with the servants with whom he had left his goods and talents. He had given the servants a job to do: increase his wealth. When he got back from his journey, he wanted to see what they had done to accomplish it and how well they accomplished it.

There is no doubt that at the return of Jesus there will be a judgment of the world. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in which he shall judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

Jesus said that there is going to be a judgment. “But I say unto you, That every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment (Mat. 12:36). The Hebrews writer simply said, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

The standard of judgment will be the words of our Lord (John 12:48). There is no wondering or debating about the standard of judgment. We will not be asked what creed book, or manual, or what other book we followed on that

great day. God's word is the standard by which we will be judged. There will be no surprises on that day when it comes to by Whom or what we will be judged.

What will be judged will be our actions: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). These servants of the parable were judged by what they did or did not do with what they had been given. They were tested with the goods and talents they had been given and judged based on the results of their efforts.

When one reads and studies the parable of the talents, these are promises that our Lord made by way of parabolic teaching. His inclusion of them in this illustrative format are further proof, when taken in conjunction with other plain passages of scripture, that these are promises of what will happen in the lives of all men.

### **The Precepts Of The Parable**

As with any teaching of Jesus, there are precepts that we must learn in order to get the full value of what our Lord said.

#### ***God Knows What We Are Capable Of Doing***

The lord of the servants dispersed his goods and money among the servants according to their abilities. Having seen these men work in his service, he knew which servant was capable of handling five talents and which servant was capable of handling one talent. He did not put on them more than that with which they would be able to cope.

God knows what we can do because He is our Creator and because He is omniscient. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He expects us to do that which we are capable of doing. Laziness is condemned in scripture (1 Tim. 5:13). The two-talent man was praised with the same words

as the five-talent man. This is because he did what he was supposed to do with what he was given, just like the five-talent man did. The lord of the servants knew the two-talent man could handle the responsibility that having two talents brought.

The one-talent man was not expected to increase his talent five-fold, or even two-fold. He was given the responsibility of one talent and was not asked to do more than he was capable of doing. God will never expect more of us than what we are capable of doing. When the woman came in and anointed the head of Jesus with expensive oil, Jesus said of her, “She hath done what she could” (Mark 14:8). This is all God expects of us.

### ***Fear Will Cause Us To Miss Out On Heaven***

The one-talent man was not an immoral person. One does not read that the one-talent man wasted his master’s goods or money. He is not seen living a life of rampant worldliness. He was simply fearful.

“But the **fearful**, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). With all the vile wickedness that is listed in that verse, the very first one mentioned is the fearful. The one-talent man said he was afraid and it cost him all that he had, his soul.

If we fear what people think or we fear ridicule for being Christians, we may lead the most moral of lives and follow all the other doctrines of Christ, we will still miss out on heaven. “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 body and soul in hell” (Mat. 10:28).

Fear keeps us from using the abilities given us by

God. If we fear failure, we will not try to do what it is that we are truly capable of doing. If we fear ridicule, we will not attempt to lead others to Christ for fear of what they may say about us. Or, we may engage in some sinful act because we do not want to be mocked or made fun of by those doing the same thing. Fear keeps us from doing what we know is right and that is sinful (Jam. 4:17).

***We Must Have A Proper Conception Of God***

The five- and two-talent men did not view the master the way the one-talent man did. When given their assignment by their lord, they went out and did what they were supposed to do. The one-talent man went and buried his talent in the ground. He viewed the master as being a hard or stern man. The other two men did not see him that way.

We must have a proper idea of who God is and what God expects of us. The God we serve is a loving God but also a just God. He is both good and severe (Rom. 11:22). God is gracious and wants all men to be saved but He is also just and will condemn those who remain in sin or go back to sin.

Jesus said that knowing God leads to eternal life (John 17:3). The only way to know God, to truly have the proper conception of Him, is to study His word in which He has revealed Himself to us. God is not unknowable or unapproachable. God does not expect of us more than we are capable of doing. God only expects of us what He knows we can do.

The five-talent man and the two-talent man were rewarded, not because they had more talents than the one-talent man, but because they were faithful. Again, the same words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,” was said to both of them (Mat. 25:21; Mat. 25:23). The two-talent man did not

gain five and he was not expected to do so. He was just as faithful with what he had been given as the five-talent man was with what he had been given. Each man understood what their master expected of them because they had the proper view of him. The one-talent man did not, and it cost him all that he had.

### ***There Is Individual Responsibility***

Each man was given an individual task and was held accountable for what he was given. Sometimes in life, the group is held accountable for what an individual does. If one member of the offensive line in football jumps offside, the coach may punish the entire unit with running sprints. God does not operate that way. The five- and two-talent men were not punished or held accountable for the failure of the one-talent man.

If a husband is in sin, his faithful wife will not be held accountable, or his children will not be punished (Eze. 18:20). That husband and father will stand before God and receive the things he has done while in his body (2 Cor. 5:10). You and I will stand before the Lord as individuals on the day of judgment.

### ***Abilities Grow If We Use Them***

The five-talent man was given the one talent of the man who lost his. The master then said: “For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (Mat. 25:29).

We understand this to be true of the physical body (Hearn). The more we use our muscles, the stronger they become. The more we work on athletic endeavors, the better we become at that skill. The more we work on our jobs, the better at them we become.

However, if we fail to use our abilities, we will lose

them. The old saying is, “Use it or lose it”. When an arm is broken and placed in a cast, when that cast is removed, the arm is noticeably smaller because the muscle has not been used while in the cast.

The same holds true of the abilities we have been given by God. If we fail to study, we will forget the things we have learned (Heb. 5:12). If we fail to sing, we lose the ability to do so. The same holds true in virtually every aspect of our spiritual lives.

Conversely, if we strive to grow, and truly give the effort to do so, we will become better students, singers, teachers, or whatever it is we are striving to be. Jesus said that if ask, seek, and knock, we will receive, find, and have the doors opened (Luke 11:9-10).

***Christians Can Live In A Way That Will Cause Them To Be Lost***

The servant who was punished for failure to do what he was asked to do was just as much a servant of the master as the two who were praised. Verse fourteen calls them “his own servants”. The one-talent servant was the master’s servant just like the five- and two-talent servants.

As mentioned earlier, the servants represent Christians, children of God. A child of God can lose his or her salvation. The majority of the denominational world believes that when one is saved, he or she can never be lost. The Bible nowhere teaches such a thing. A child of God can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). A servant of God can live in fear and be cast out (Mat. 25:30).

Christians have the responsibility of remaining faithful. The five- and two-talent men, though differing in ability, were still faithful with what they had. This was all that was expected of the one-talent man as well, but he was not faithful. The faithfulness of the two men was rewarded while the lack of faithfulness in the one was punished. This has

always been and will always be the case.

### **Conclusion**

The parable of the talents shows the need to be ready for the end of time or the end of life, whichever comes first. Death is coming for all and we must be ready because we do not know when it will come. The Lord is returning and we must be ready because we do not know when He will come.

The five- and two-talent men were ready because they were faithful. The one-talent man was not ready because he was fearful.

May it be the case with each of us that we remain faithful to the commands of our Master so that we can hear those joyous words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

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## Daniel's Seventy Weeks

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*



Keith Mosher has been married to Dorothy for fifty-three years. Together they have three children: Keith Jr., Mark, and Karen. Keith began preaching in 1965 and graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1975. He has received B.A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Amridge University. Also, he has received a Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion. Keith has written three books and is a staff writer for the Gospel Journal. He has done local work in Mississippi and Tennessee. For the past thirty-nine years he has been teaching at the Memphis School of Preaching, where he serves as dean of academics and student life.

### Appreciation

My thankfulness is given to Don Blackwell, Robert Jefferies, and to the elders of the Southaven congregation for this invitation to be a part of the Power Lectureship series. I, of course, have a long relationship with this church and have great admiration for their continued service to the Lord. I pray that this year's study on *The End of Time* will find a large audience, for it is a most needed topic.

### Introduction

The kingdom of Israel divided about 975 B.C. and about three centuries later the Median king, Cyaxares II (635-585 B.C.) allied with the Assyrian-Babylonian general Nabopolassar (625-605 B.C.) and together they destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C., thus bringing to an end the Assyrian empire and fulfilling the prophecies of Nahum (Turner class notes). Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, married a granddaughter of Cyaxares and then began his conquests of the lands west including Palestine (ibid). In 606 B.C., 590

B.C., and finally in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, during the three invasions, took Israel (especially Judah) captive and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple of God (ibid). In one year all the kingdoms of Syria and Palestine were paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar and in 601 B.C. even Egypt fell to the Babylonian king (cf. 2 Kin. 2:2 and Jer. 22:18ff). Secular historians of that time report that Nebuchadnezzar “was possessed by some god or other” and later died (Turner class notes).

Evil-Merodach followed Nebuchadnezzar to the throne of Babylon, but Evil-Merodach was murdered by his son, Neriglissar, who ruled for just four years, and then the latter king left the throne of Babylon to his infant son, Labashi-Marduk, who was killed by Nabonidus (556 B.C.)(ibid). Nabonidus’ son, Belshazzar, was the king who saw the “handwriting on the wall” and who suffered destruction from Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king whom God called to the throne (Dan. 5:26; 2 Chr. 36:22-23).

Cyrus, who came to power about 559 B.C., subjugated Babylon in 539 B.C. and left his son, Cambyses, in that city to represent the Persian government (Turner class notes). Cambyses is called *Artaxerxes* in Holy Writ (Ezra 4:6-10) and it was the latter king who called a halt to the rebuilding efforts in Palestine, started after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon, having obtained direct orders from Cyrus that the Jews could travel back to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-2). After Cambyses committed suicide, and after a sixteen-year delay (Ezra 4:24), Darius Hystaspis gave the Jews permission to continue building the temple (Ezra 6:1-14). The temple was finished, finally, in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

Cyrus was the king in power in Persia while Daniel lived there in captivity and Persia was the place where Daniel received the prophetic visions discussed in this study—which

visions are now contained in the passage known as ***Daniel chapter nine*** in our English Bibles. The Jews spent seventy years in captivity, mostly in Babylon, and then for a few years during Cyrus' reign, and Daniel was there for most of that time (cf. Dan. 1:3). The main purpose of Daniel's message was to emphasize that God rules in the affairs of men and controls them for His purposes (Dan. 2:21; Dan 4:17; Dan. 4:25; Dan. 4:32; Dan. 5:21).

Ezekiel witnessed Daniel's prophecies (Eze. 14:14; Eze. 14:20; Eze. 28:3) for Daniel had been in Babylonian captivity about fifteen years before Ezekiel arrived (Eze. 8:1; Eze. 20:1). Also, ***fulfilled prophecy is a witness to the authenticity of Daniel's writings and it is in the framework of the foregoing concept that Daniel's prediction of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24) can be studied.*** The main thrust in this essay, however, mainly involves three verses found in chapter nine and numbered twenty-four through twenty-seven (which will be quoted and examined later in this study).

But, to facilitate this chapter in the lectureship book, the ***context*** of Daniel, chapter nine, will also be examined as to ***Daniel and the prophecy of Jeremiah*** (Dan. 9:1-2); ***Daniel's prayer*** (Dan. 9:3-19); ***Daniel and the archangel Gabriel*** (Dan. 9:20-23); and ***Daniel's seventy weeks*** (Dan. 9:24-27). Someone might ask as to why the entire chapter is being discussed here and not just verses twenty-four through twenty-seven and the answer would be that the context of the entire chapter is important to an understanding of the verses to be emphasized concerning the prophecy of the ***seventy weeks***.

### **Daniel And The Prophecy Of Jeremiah**

Jackson noted that "Jesus Christ emphatically declared that the Old Testament Scriptures contained prophecies he would fulfill (Luke 24:27, 44)" (Christian Courier 1). Turner

added that: "The very great likelihood is that Chapter IX of Daniel is discussed more often and with more fervor than any other chapter (perhaps book) in either the Old Testament or the New Testament" (295).

Daniel, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, started his *seventy weeks* vision with a statement about "Darius, the son of Ahasuerus of the seed of the Medes" (Dan. 9:1a). Turner added:

Who was the "Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes?" This is an important question that begs to be addressed at the outset of a study of Daniel's seventy weeks. For one point of consideration, this "Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes" was not the "Darius the Mede" of Daniel 5:31 "who received the kingdom, being about threescore years old." (297)

Merritt also explained that Darius was not a Persian and that:

Ahasuerus was called Xerxes by the Jews. The Persians called him, Khshayarsha. The Greeks, who were the historians of that era, called him Xerxes. He was the king who gave an extended feast to his lord. He married the beautiful Jewess, Esther, after putting away the current queen, Vashti (book of Esther). Xerxes was murdered by the captain of his guard. (179)

What has occurred with the mistaken identity of the two men

named Darius is that many scholars have taught that Daniel's prediction of *seventy weeks* expired when Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Palestine, but:

...only sixty-six years had intervened from the carrying away of certain youths, including Daniel, to Babylon until Cyrus' decree that the Jews were free to return to their homeland. To illustrate, the date for Nebuchadnezzar, as ruler, is set at 605 BC [605-539 = 66], a period of sixty-six years. Thus, a period of seventy years had not intervened from the carrying away of Daniel and the other young men to Babylon until the decree of Cyrus [sixty-six years later as a matter of fact]. (Turner 299)

Merritt added:

There were several kings named Darius and the one mentioned in this verse [Daniel 9:1, K.M.] was known as Darius I, referred to in history as Darius the Great, because of his riches and accomplishments. The first Mede to sit on the Babylonian throne was also named Darius. (179)

Daniel's prophecy, then, of *seventy weeks* had to occur later in history. (Turner used four pages of his commentary on Daniel to give the background information as to the identity of the *two* kings named Darius (297-301).)

It is the case that Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be seventy years of Babylonian captivity for the Jews

(Dan. 9:2; Jer. 25:11; Jer. 29:10). But Cyrus' decree for the Jews to return came three years before the captives started going back to Jerusalem in 536 B.C., a total of only sixty-six years (Turner 299). However, because it was then the historical time for a return of the Jews to Palestine, which chronology Daniel had learned from Jeremiah, Daniel gave himself to prayer.

### Daniel's Prayer

Daniel wrote: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confessions" (KJV, Dan. 9:3-4a). Since the seventy years of captivity for the Jews was nearly over, why did Daniel find it necessary to be penitent and why was he seemingly depressed? Turner surmised that: "Daniel had been reading the books, and especially the writings of Jeremiah, and he [Daniel, K.M.] had calculated that the seventy-year period of desolation had expired, *but there was no indication that the city, including the walls, would be rebuilt*" (310) [emphasis added, K.M.]. Perhaps Daniel's sadness was a result of knowing the latter problem.

However, Daniel also knew that the reason he and his fellow Jews had been taken into captivity was their own fault as punishment for their sins of idolatry and of their seeking foreign alliances in order to go to war against Babylon instead of turning to God and trusting Him (Dan. 9:5-15). Daniel knew that he and his people had not depended on God for any protection from Babylon (Dan. 9:5). The prophet also knew that the nation had not listened to God and had rebelled in disobedience to the law of God:

Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law,  
even by departing, that they might not obey

thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us this great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. (Dan. 9:11-13)

Daniel, an inspired prophet of God put his stamp of approval on God's punishment of Israel and the need for penitence from all the Jews, for no others were guilty but the Israelites. Turner contemplated Daniel's penitent attitude and wrote: "His prayer was a frantic, begging, pleading prayer like the prayer of a mother whose child has just been injured and seems to be dying" (314). Young added: "The intensity of conviction and importunity expressed in the prayer well serve as a model for the attitude in all true prayer" (189).

Daniel based his petition upon the great mercy accomplished by God during His mighty act of delivering the Jews from Egyptian bondage, for God had established His name among the nations by freeing those ancient Jews, and Daniel based his plea for favor upon that blessed name (Dan. 9:15). Young noted that: "It was the historical act of redemption which distinguished the LORD [sic] from false gods, and gave Him a Name [sic], as the covenant God of deliverance" (188). Daniel thus counted on God again to deliver the Jews of Daniel's day from Babylonian captivity.

The entire thought of Daniel's prayer was summed up as:

O God, who in times past hast wrought wonderful deliverances for thy people, and thereby acquired a glorious name—repeat thy wondrous doings, and add to the glory which thou hast already acquired! As thou didst bring us out of exile in Egypt, so also bring us out of exile in Babylon. (Moses Stuart as found in Young 188)

### **Daniel And The Archangel Gabriel**

While Daniel was “speaking in prayer,” an amazing event occurred for “the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation” (Dan. 9:21). Daniel called Gabriel a *man* and seems to indicate that the archangel had the *appearance* of a man (cf. Merritt 185).

Turner noted that:

In his very earnest prayer, Daniel was confessing his sins [though a great man, he was only a man], and the sins of his people; then the man Gabriel [in actuality Gabriel was and is an angel, but he appeared to Daniel in the form of a man] touched Daniel at the time of the evening oblation. Now, in reality there was no actual evening oblation since the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar—a period of fifty years ago. For centuries before that destruction, there had been such an observance—in fact, in all the time from Moses until the



city was burned. God had instructed Moses: “Now this is that which thou [Aaron and the priests] [sic] shalt offer upon the altar: two lambs a year old day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even” (Ex. 29:38). A matter to be emphasized is that while there was no actual observance of the evening oblation, Daniel had continued in the spirit of the observance by means of confession, prayer, and contemplation. (315)

Daniel had previously been visited by Gabriel and knew the angel (Dan 8:16-27), but what Daniel did not know was that because of his true heart of faithfulness he was *greatly beloved* by heaven (Dan. 9:23). (Gabriel had left heaven at the time that Daniel started to pray (Dan. 9:21); so is heaven one prayer away as fast as an angel can fly? McGuiggan added that if “Gabriel were to catch us in prayer he’d have to come exceedingly quickly” (146). Obviously, McGuiggan meant that many do not pray very much.)

Daniel wrote that Gabriel had come to give the prophet *skill* and *understanding* (Dan. 9:22). The information that would make for skill and understanding was about the future of Daniel’s people and was couched in terms of *seventy weeks*.

### Daniel’s Seventy Weeks

For purposes of this study the entirety of the text under examination is quoted first, below, and then all comments, suggestions, and interpretations will follow. The passage reads as follows:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. (Dan. 9:24-27)

Turner explained that:

The angel Gabriel had appeared to show Daniel not just a seventy year period, but rather seventy weeks of years, or seven times seventy years. In short, a period of

490 years had been decreed for Daniel's people, and for the holy city [Jerusalem] as well. The 490 year period would be necessary in order: 1. To finish transgression. 2. To make an end of sins. 3. To make reconciliation for iniquity. 4. To bring in everlasting righteousness. 5. To seal up vision and prophecy. 6. To anoint the most holy. (316)

The phrase *to finish transgression* (Dan. 9:24a) is a reference to the ending of idolatry in Judah, which finish was brought about by the Babylonian captivity and other punishments of the Jews by God, Who often brought Judah “the bread of adversity and the water of affliction” (Isa. 30:20). Jeremiah called Babylon a “boiling cauldron” as if that nation would *burn* idolatry out of Judah (Jer. 1:13). Zechariah wrote that when Jesus came, God would have “cut off the names of idols out of the land and they shall be no more remembered” (Zec. 13:2). Some feel that the phrase *to finish transgression* is a reference to the “primary purpose of Christ’s mission to earth.” (e.g Jackson 2). However, the contextual continuity in verse twenty-four of Daniel nine until there is a mention of Messiah, Who would come and be anointed, indicates that He would come after the holy city, Jerusalem, was restored.

It is the case that when Messiah came, He would *make an end of sins* and bring *reconciliation for iniquity*, which efforts would result in *everlasting righteousness* (Dan. 9:24b). Under the Mosaic dispensation, sins were remembered and not legally remitted (Heb. 10:1-4). The precious blood of Christ is the *only* means for remission of sins and everlasting righteousness (Heb. 9:22; Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:21).

“Some scholars affirm remission of sins did occur

under the Mosaic dispensation by citing references to Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7, which references refer to forgiveness of sins” (Turner 318). Some scholars also like to refer to Romans 3:25 to insist on complete forgiveness during times of animal sacrifice (ibid). Paul wrote: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25). Murro, however, noted that:

In Romans 3:25 Paul uses *paresis* [sic] instead of the usual *aphesis* [sic]. The former means “putting aside, disregarding, pretermission,” the latter, “putting away completely and unreservedly (French, *Synonyms of the NT*). It [*paresis*, K.M.] does not mean forgiveness in the completed sense, and in the AV is incorrectly “remission.” Nor does it mean that God had intentionally suspended punishment for which at some date he might inflict it (Sanday on Rom. 3:25). It appeared that God had treated sins then as though he had forgiven them, though in fact such an attitude on the part of God was without such a foundation as was later supplied by an adequate atonement, and so the apostle avoids saying that God forgave them. This passing over of sins had the tendency of destroying man’s conception of God’s righteousness, and in order to avert this Christ was set forth as a propitiation and God’s disregard of sin (*paresis*) became a real forgiveness

(*aphesis*) of Acts 14:16; 17:30. (1132-1133)

Since the Jews were only in captivity in Babylon for seventy years (Jer. 25:12; Dan. 9:2; Zec. 1:12; Zec. 7:5), the 490 years mentioned in Daniel 9:24 had to refer either to more time to come or to a combination of times before and after captivity. The question remains as to how does one come to the number, 490 years? After determining that the time frame for a *seventy*-year captivity was the consequence of not observing the Sabbatical year at any time in Jewish history (cf. Lev. 25:1-7) and that the Jews were sentenced to seventy years of punishment until the land of Canaan “had enjoyed its Sabbaths” (2 Chr. 36:21), Jackson surmised the following:

If each of the 70 captivity years represented the violation of a Sabbatical year, as II Chronicles 36:21 appears to indicate, this suggests that Israel had ignored that divine requirement for at least some 490 years (70 times 7—the Sabbatical coming each 7<sup>th</sup> year). The Babylonian Captivity was, therefore, sort of a midway historical point. It looked back upon some 490 years of sinful conduct; and then looked forward 490 years to the “end of sin.” (Christian Courier 1) [the terms underlined above were done so in the original, K.M.]

The terminus of Daniel 9:24 reads as follows: “and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.” Within the period of 490 years, when Messiah came,

the “visions and prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah [the Redeemer] would be fulfilled—that is, they would no longer be open and awaiting fulfillment” (Turner 320). Merritt added: “The word “seal” carries a meaning of assurance, guarantee or authenticity of that which has been set forth. In this case, it gives proof by coming to pass” (186).

Brethren have presented two views as to the meaning of *anoint the most holy*. McGuiggan explained:

To “*anoint the most holy*” [sic] may be rendered “a most holy person,” a most holy thing,” or “a most holy place.” If it is to be rendered “a most holy one,” then we’d have Jesus Christ in view and the coming of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (see Isaiah 61:1ff; Luke 4:8ff). If it’s to be “a most holy place” we’d have the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the new temple, the church of God (see Acts 2:1ff; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:20ff). (153)

Brethren, such as Turner and Merritt, hold that the reference to the most “Holy One” is about Jesus, but McGuiggan opted for its referring to the church. The sense offered here is that Gabriel was telling Daniel about the initial coming of Messiah. Jackson explained:

While it is possible that the grammar can reflect a “most holy” thing or place (i.e., in a neuter form), it also can yield a masculine sense—“Most Holy One.” The immediate context tips the scales toward the masculine since the “anointed one, the prince” is mentioned in verse twenty-five.

The “anointing” obviously belongs to the same time frame as the events previously mentioned, hence is associated with the Lord’s **first** coming, not the **second** one. (Christian Courier 3)

Daniel’s timetable received from Gabriel can be divided into three major divisions. The first is seven “weeks” or forty-nine years; the second is sixty-two weeks or 434 years which was the interim between the weeks (forty-nine years) and the one week (seven years) making a total of 483 years; and the third is the one-week period which was the time of the good news of the Gospel of Christ and, per Turner: “The Christ, a member of the Godhead, would inhabit the earth (and that in the person of the flesh), thereby making a total of 490 years” (321). Daniel had had a vision of two saints speaking and one had asked the other: “How long shall be the vision, concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot?” (Dan. 8:13). Gabriel’s timetable given to Daniel is, obviously, the initial answer to the questions posed by that saint:

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. (Dan. 9:25)

The Persian king, Cyrus, gave the command to rebuild Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-3). In fact, Cyrus was informed (by the scroll of Isaiah, written 140 years prior), that

he was to be the one who would be God's anointed and that he would enable the captive Jews to return and build (Isa. 44:24-28). Cyrus reigned from 558-529 B.C. but did not rule from Babylon until 539 B.C., so the command to rebuild could not be earlier than the latter year (Turner 323). It was in 536 B.C. that "Zerubbabel led a company of fewer than 50,000 Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem" (ibid; cf. Ezra 2:70). Jackson, however, felt that to begin with Zerubbabel's return for 486 years and then count from his time would find one in 50 B.C. and that would be eighty years before the "anointed one," Jesus, would begin His ministry (Christian Courier 4). Jackson opted for the return of Ezra in 457 B.C., who came to restore the law of Moses (Ezra 7:10), for 486 and one-half years (the middle of the week, Daniel 9:27) from 457 B.C. exactly ends in A.D. 30, which year Jesus began His ministry (ibid).

The objection to Jackson's more common view above is that Ezra did not come to restore the city of Jerusalem, but according to Ezra 7:6-7 and also Ezra 9:9, that ancient scribe had authority to rebuild parts of the city and therefore "it is logical to understand 457 B.C. as the *terminus a quo* [sic] for the decree predicted in Daniel 9:25" (Gleason Archer as quoted in the Christian Courier by Jackson 4). Merritt confirmed Jackson's view and added that: "it becomes very evident that the decree given to Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes is the proper date to use" (190). Ezra did write:

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and



Artaxerxes king of Persia. (Ezra 6:14)

Historically, then, Messiah would come to a restored Jerusalem and in the middle of the “week” His ministry would be “cut off” (Dan. 9:26-27). The action of “cutting off” would not be for Messiah’s benefit, but for the world’s (cf. John 3:16-17). Jesus’ ministry was just three and one-half years (*or the middle of the week*) and when He died on that cruel cross, He ended the ancient animal sacrifices and oblations (Dan. 9:27; Heb. 10:1-4; Rom. 7:4-7). But, the covenant with the Jews under the Mosaic dispensation did mean that they would hear the Christ first (Mat. 10:5) and then the Jews also heard the Gospel first after Jesus’ death and the beginning of the church of Christ (Acts 2:5ff). When the *one week* of Daniel’s prophecy would be over, the Gentiles would hear the Gospel message (Acts 10).

It is necessary at this point to mention the various, mostly erroneous views of the one who would *confirm the covenant with many* (Dan. 9:27a). The premillennial view is that “the person under consideration as making the covenant is naturally the antichrist” (Leupold 431). Then there is the idea, promulgated by Thomas (a member of the church of Christ), that “the ‘seventy weeks,’ or seventy heptads, is a figurative way of describing all future ages, from Daniel’s day to the end of time” (66). A third view is that the first three and one-half years of the *week* represents the time of John the Baptizer and the last three and one-half years the time of Jesus’ ministry (Prideaux 246-247). Four other views of Daniel’s seventy weeks are listed by Walvoord as follows:

In opposition to the futuristic interpretation, at least four other views have been advanced: (1) the liberal view that the seventieth seven is fulfilled in

events following the Maccabean persecution just as the preceding sixty-nine sevens were; (2) the view of Jewish scholars that the seventieth week is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (a view also taught by McGuiggan, 158); (3) the view that the seventieth week of Daniel is an indefinite period beginning with Christ but extending to the end, often held by amillenarians such as Young and Leupold; (4) that the seventieth seven is seven literal years beginning with the public ministry of Christ and ending about three and a half years after his death. (232)

Is the *week* recorded in Daniel 9:27 literal or figurative? Are all of the numbers in the passage *heptads*; that is, figurative of many future years? With Turner, I am in agreement that:

...the essence of the foregoing is that Daniel's prophecies of the seven weeks consisted of 49 literal years; the sixty-two weeks consisted of 434 literal years; and the one week consisted of 7 literal years. Thus a total of 490 years was required by God to cover the violations of his afore-time requirements. There really is no place for an explanation of heptads—that is, figurative as a means of determining the time “when the commandment went forth” and/or the terminal date for the destruction of Jerusalem—certain scholars to the contrary notwithstanding. In reality, how may one account for the wild farfetched

interpretations of so many of the scholars?  
(342)

It is definitely the case that Daniel's prophecy ended in a reference to the ***abomination that makes for desolation*** and that Jesus said that when one would see such (a reference to the Roman army surrounding Jerusalem in A.D. 70) one should flee (Dan. 9:27; Mat. 24:15). Futuristic and millennial views have no explanation for the way Jesus interpreted the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Jackson added that: "Josephus, the Jewish historian, stated that 'Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them'" (Christian Courier 6 from *Antiquities of the Jews* X.XI.7).

### **Conclusion**

When Daniel and the seed royal were taken to Babylon in 606 B.C. the seventy-year captivity of the Jews as predicted by Isaiah and Jeremiah began as a "furnace of affliction" on the disobedient Jews (Dan. 9:1-2; Jer. 1:13; Isa 30:20; Isa. 48:10). When the time of the captivity was nearly over, Daniel began praying about the sins of his people and about his own need for penitence (Dan. 9:3-23). While Daniel was praying the archangel Gabriel came with a message, couched in strange terms, about the future of Israel and the coming of Messiah, which coming would be 490 years from the time of Daniels' vision.

It is also the case that the week mentioned in Daniel 9:27 represents seven years and "there is really no wonder that the ministry of Christ was confined exclusively to his people, the Jews, for an exact seven-year period. There was not only a literal fulfillment of the first sixty-nine and one-half sevens...but there was also a literal fulfillment of the second half of the one week" (Turner 344).

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# Atheism's Argument: How Can A Just God Punish The Wicked Eternally In Hell?

*Scott Cain*



Scott Cain is married to Melissa, and together they have three sons: Walker, Tanner, and Hunter. He is a native of Lawrence County, Tennessee, and a 2009 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching. He has served as an evangelist with congregations in Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Scott has been privileged to engage in foreign mission efforts in cities and villages in Fiji, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, and Austria. Currently, Scott serves as the preacher with the DeGaulle Drive congregation in New Orleans, Louisiana.

## Introduction

Imagine there's no heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today

Thus John Lennon softly lyricized world peace for secularist, humanist, atheist, and communist minds, calling it “easy” to “imagine.” Paul disagreed. Surveying ancient versions of these mindsets, the apostle observed that the abundantly sufficient evidence of God’s existence leaves souls “without excuse” for such “vain imaginations” (KJV, Rom. 1:20-21). Those who have objectively observed the evidence and arguments for the reality of God (cosmological,

teleological, and ontological), who without bias have weighed the facts of the Bible's integrity (contradiction-less consistency, historical accuracy, scientific foreknowledge, and prophetic accuracy), must likewise disagree: to imagine there is no heaven or hell is not "easy if you try."

Hell's presence is an admittedly unpleasant proposition to imagine. Scripture supplies several explicit descriptions of the horrors of hell (translated from the Greek word *gehenna*).

1. A place of fire that is never quenched (Mat. 5:22; Mat. 18:9; Mark 9:43-48).
2. A place of gnawing that never ceases (Mark 9:43-48 "where their worm dieth not").
3. A place of destruction (loss and ruin) for the body and soul (Mat. 10:28).
4. A place of damnation (Mat. 23:33).

Other Biblical references describe hell without specifically using the word *gehenna*:

1. A place of outer darkness (Mat. 8:12; Mat. 22:13; Mat. 25:30).
2. A place of tears (Mat. 8:12; Mat. 22:13; Mat. 25:30).
3. A place of separation from the presence of the Lord (Mat. 25:41).
4. A place prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41).
5. A place of everlasting punishment (Mat. 25:46).

Who enjoys imagining a place so permanently painful (fire and gnawing), forever fearful (darkness and demons), ceaselessly sorrowful (tears and regret), and hopelessly helpless (ruin and condemnation)? This small sampling of Biblical descriptions shares a source: Jesus Christ. Twelve times *gehenna* was employed to describe hell; Jesus spoke eleven of those times. For those convinced that Jesus is the

Christ, the Son of the living God, what is “easy” to “imagine” is not found by asking, “What seems most pleasant,” but rather by asking, “What did Jesus teach?” Hell is hard to imagine, but it is harder to imagine Jesus lying or being mistaken about hell.

### **Atheism’s Argument**

“You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one.” Mr. Lennon was not the first or the last to imagine hell’s absence. Philosophers, skeptics, and even theologians litter history with refusals to accept the concept of eternal hell. Lennon-like dreamers who imagine “no hell below” often express difficulty fathoming hell’s nightmarish horrors. Disdain for the doctrine of hell has resulted in attacks against the very idea of a God who would “create” such a place, asserting that the Biblical teaching on hell is sufficient reason to reject the existence of the God of the Bible.

Robert Ingersoll, nicknamed “The Great Agnostic,” wrote,

The God of Hell should be held in loathing, contempt and scorn. A God who threatens eternal pain should be hated, not loved—cursed, not worshiped. A heaven presided over by such a God must be below the lowest hell. I want no part in any heaven in which the saved, the ransomed and redeemed will drown with shouts of joy the cries and sobs of hell—in which happiness will forget misery, where the tears of the lost only increase laughter and double bliss.

The idea of hell was born of ignorance,

brutality, fear, cowardice, and revenge. This idea testifies that our remote ancestors were the lowest beasts. Only from dens, lairs, and caves, only from mouths filled with cruel fangs, only from hearts of fear and hatred, only from the conscience of hunger and lust, only from the lowest and most debased could come this most cruel, heartless and bestial of all dogmas.

Bertrand Russell, in his essay *Why I Am Not a Christian*, penned,

There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.

Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching...

I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world...

I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put



cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.

Antony Flew, the foremost atheistic voice of his day, debated Thomas B. Warren,

I must confess that this subject of the doctrine of hell is one about which I find it very difficult to maintain my supposed national British calm and reserve. But let me, with what restraint I can muster, say that if anything can be known to be monstrously, inordinately wrong and unjust, it is the conduct of which this God is said to assume. If anything can be known to be just quite monstrously, inordinately, unquestionably unjust and evil, it is the conduct of a Being creating conscious creatures, whether human or animal, in the full knowledge, and with the intention, that these creatures should be maintained by His sustaining power eternally in infinite and unlimited torment. I speak of this with what little restraint I can muster because, if anything seems clear to me about good and evil, just and unjust, it is clear to me that this is monstrous. (Warren 84-85)

Charles Templeton, the evangelist-turned-skeptic,

once said,

I couldn't hold someone's hand to a fire for a moment. Not an instant! How could a loving God, just because you don't obey him and do what he wants, torture you forever—not allowing you to die, but to continue in that pain for eternity? There is no criminal who would do this! (Strobel 173)

Dan Barker, another preacher-turned-atheist and co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, has repeatedly used the concept of hell as grounds to berate the notion of God:

If that kind of a God does exist, then he has earned my extreme disrespect. And if he wants to prove what a big macho man he is by sending someone like me to hell, then let him do it. Fine. I go to hell gladly, proudly knowing I have resisted somebody like...a dictator like that who would create a hell in the first place. (Butt and Barker)

Any system of thought that's based to any extent upon a threat of violence, which is what hell is; it's a threat of eternal torture...Any system of thought that has that thought in it, that scares the mind of children to go to bed at night wondering if they're going to go to hell, is a morally bankrupt system. (Butt and Barker)

Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, compared teaching children about hell with sexual abuse: “It seems to me that telling children such that they really, really believe that people who sin are going to go to hell and roast forever...It seems to me to be intuitively entirely reasonable that that is a worse form of child abuse that will give more nightmares, that will give more genuine distress” (ContraFaith).

Some professed believers have been so disturbed by the idea of eternal hell that they have begun opposing it. In his book *Christ Will Come Again*, Stephen H. Travis wrote that “eternal torment serves no useful purpose, and therefore exhibits a vindictiveness incompatible with the love of God in Christ” (199).

Even members of the body of Christ have professed an inability to reconcile the concept of hell with the nature of God. These include Jesse B. Ferguson in 1846, Edward William Fudge in 1982, F. Lagard Smith in 1988, Homer Hailey in a book published after his death in 2000, and Jimmy Allen in 2004. Denying hell’s eternality, F. Lagard Smith wrote that God is “not a twisted, cruel God who tortures the wicked, dangling them over licking flames” (*After Life*).

Hear the common refrain of these various men from various times with various worldviews:

The basic argument against hell can be stated like this: It is unjust to punish someone eternally for sins they committed in their few years on Earth; the biblical concept of hell entails such punishment; therefore the biblical concept of hell is unjust (which would mean, of course, that the God of the Bible is unjust as well). (Butt, “The Reality”)

### **Analyzing The Argument**

This line of argumentation aims to make the Bible's description of God seem contradictory, asserting that God's love and justice preclude the existence of eternal punishment. The Bible describes God as all-knowing and all-truthful (1 John 3:20; Tit. 1:2), so there is no room for contradiction in His nature. A proven contradiction in God's nature would constitute a breach in His knowledge (able to be wrong) or a breach in His honesty (able to lie), and thus He would fall short of the Biblical description. In short, if hell's existence contradicts God's nature, namely His love or His justice, then the God of the Bible does not exist.

Since atheism's argument about hell seeks to dismantle the Bible's description of God, an honest inquirer must be careful not to view God's Biblical descriptions with mere human definitions. If the Bible predates the souls on earth today (and it does), and if the Bible predates modern society (and it does), then let critical investigators be consistent enough to examine Biblical concepts using Biblical terms as the Bible used them rather than expecting the Bible to conform to newly created definitions reflecting modern sentiments and mentalities. If a man would impugn God's goodness and love, let him do so by seeing if God fails to fulfill the definitions and terms given in the Book attributed to Him. Apostates have no right to rewrite the Bible to teach what it never taught, nor have skeptics the right to rewrite Biblical definitions to mean what they never meant!

Does hell's existence contradict the nature of God? Consider six aspects of the argument.

#### ***First, Atheism's Argument Elevates Emotion Above Reason***

Appealing to emotions, they "insist that an eternal hell is not compatible with God's great love and mercy" (Highers 44). In this modern culture of sentimentalism and

hypersensitivities, the argument that gains emotional agreement usually prevails regardless of its soundness or validity. When men use feelings and emotional reactions to gauge whether the idea of an eternal hell is appropriate and true, “it is naught but human emotionalism that obscures the issue” (Jackson 35). Instead of letting emotions determine what is “fact,” evidence and reason should determine emotional reactions. Instead of basing conclusions on whether they like or dislike an idea, let souls ask whether hell’s existence is morally just and right. God’s eternal standards are not subject to the whims of modern western sentimentalism.

***Second, Atheism’s Argument Relies On Finite Human Perspectives***

Man’s synthetic standards drip from the skeptic’s lip: recall Bertrand Russell’s emphasis on “my mind,” “I do not myself feel,” “I really do not think,” and “I think,” Antony Flew’s assessment of “seems clear to me,” Richard Dawkins’s “It seems to me” (twice), and Charles Templeton’s statement that “I couldn’t” punish someone with fire.

These **finite** viewpoints ignore the **infinite** nature of the Biblical God. For instance, one man cannot know another’s thoughts (1 Cor. 2:11), but God’s infinite knowledge perceives the thoughts of every heart (1 Kin. 8:39). Any question hinging on the hypothetical “If you were God” scenario is inherently flawed; man is not God! Therefore, any question that puts man into God’s shoes and asks, “What would you do,” seeks an answer man cannot give! “We might say that if we were God we would not let suffering exist or hell become a reality. But, what does this prove? Simply that we would not act as God acts. Such does not prove that God acts wrongly...” (Winkler 46). “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?" (Rom. 11:33-34).

It is no coincidence that the it-seems-to-me mentality leads to the very place it seeks to disprove: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). As Peter Kreeft said, "The national anthem of hell is, 'I Did It My Way.'" Emotion-driven conclusions and finite perspectives are inadequate for this investigation and must be rejected.

***Third, Atheism's Argument Implies A Moral Deficiency In The God Of The Bible***

Russell labeled belief in hell as a "very serious defect...in Christ's moral character." Flew called hell "inordinately wrong" and "evil." Dawkins categorized the teaching as a "worse" (superlatively wrong) form of child abuse. Barker accounted any belief system that included hell as "morally bankrupt." Moral judgment has been passed upon God based on hell's severity.

Ironically, the man who charged the Bible of containing a "morally bankrupt system" readily admits that his worldview of secular atheistic humanism allows for no objective morality (Butt and Barker). If no objective standard for morality exists, then his moral charge against the doctrine of hell is "a subjectively perceived moral dilemma" (Lyons and Butt), based upon a subjective and therefore inconclusive moral standard. Here is an atheist accusing God of moral wrongdoing, yet he believes there is no absolute standard of moral right and wrong: what could be more "morally bankrupt" than this? Without God, men are simply the result of physical cosmic processes and have no moral purpose. Without God, there exists no solid, consistent, or logical basis to call one action "morally good" and another "morally wrong." Only a Creator has the authority to determine

absolute moral right and wrong, and that is exactly what God supplies (Psa. 19:1; Psa. 19:7-9). A skeptic who charges God with immorality is borrowing concepts that rely on God's existence and hurling accusations that have no standard without God's existence.

Can God's moral behavior be objectively examined? Absolutely, but such an examination must assume an absolute standard of morality, and since the only absolute standard of morality is God (because without God there is no objective standard), an examination into God's morality must use the Bible's moral standards, not man's. "If the skeptic accuses the Bible of portraying God as immoral, however, he must allow the Bible to answer for itself" (Butt, "Why Did God?"). Thus, the question is not, "Is God's behavior consistent with my manmade moral standard," but rather, "Is God's behavior consistent with the Biblical moral standard?"

The morality or immorality of hell's existence will depend upon whether or not hell can be shown to be inconsistent with the remaining aspects of God's nature that are impugned by atheism's argument: God's love, God's justice, and man's liberty.

***Fourth, Atheism's Argument Implies A Deficiency In God's Love***

Russell used Jesus' teaching on hell to question whether Christ was "profoundly humane" and had "a proper degree of kindness." Ingersoll called hell a "heartless" dogma. Travis saw hell as "incompatible with the love of God." Templeton questioned how a "loving God" could "torture you forever." The assertion: an eternal hell is inconsistent with a God of love.

***Fifth, Atheism's Argument Implies A Deficiency In God's Justice***

Russell accused Christ of "vindictive fury." Flew repeatedly ruled that hell was "unjust." Templeton judged punishment by eternal fire as something that "no criminal

would do.” Travis called it “vindictiveness.” Barker depicted hell as God proving “what a big macho man he is.” The assertion: an eternal hell is inconsistent with a God of justice.

***Sixth, Atheism's Argument Implies A Deficiency In Man's Liberty***

Flew charged God with creating souls “with the intention, that these creatures should be maintained by His sustaining power eternally in infinite and unlimited torment.” Templeton said hell was for those who “don't obey [God] and do what he wants.” Barker maligned God as a “dictator” for “sending someone like me to hell.” Such reasoning lays responsibility for a soul's eternal abode squarely on God, spotlighting God's intent, God's desires, and God's actions of “sending” souls to hell. The assertion: an eternal hell is inconsistent with human free will.

Atheism's six-faceted argument reduces to three questions. Are the horrors of hell morally inconsistent with the Biblical description of God's love? Are the horrors of hell morally inconsistent with the Biblical description of God's justice? Are the horrors of hell morally inconsistent with the Biblical description of man's liberty?

**Answering The Argument**

***The Horrors Of Hell Are Morally Consistent With God's Love***

To quote John Lennon again, “All you need is love.” Here Paul would agree, for he said that without love a man is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). John (the apostle) wrote that “love is of God” and that “God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). If God is love, how can hell exist?

*The Reality of Hell Does Not Negate God's Love That Desires Men to Be Saved.*

God gave Jesus so that “whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God does not desire that “any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God's will is for “all men to



be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Hell was never intended for man, but “for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Nevertheless, despite God’s love and desire for souls to be saved, some will be lost.

Jesus is proof-positive that God loves each soul and wants all to be saved (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10). Jesus, who showed man the extent of God’s love, taught more about hell than any other New Testament individual. “The most loving man that ever lived said more about hell than anyone else in the Bible” (Pharr 5). Jesus knew how to preach endless punishment “without negating the loveliness and glory of God” (Edwards 185).

*The Reality Of Hell Does Not Negate God’s Love That Allows Men To Choose*

Since God wants all men to be saved, and since Scripture describes some as going “away into everlasting punishment” (Mat. 25:46), then it must be concluded that God does not always get what He wants. This brings the question: “Why? If God is all-powerful, then why does He not get what He wants and save every soul?” The answer: God is all-powerful, but He does not force His will on people. If He forced people to be saved against their wills, He would then be the “dictator” that skeptics have accused Him of being. God lets men choose whether they will love Him and obey Him (John 14:15). This, too, is a demonstration of His love.

The concept of love “demands that a free moral agent gets to choose” (Butt, *Atheism, God*). This is evident in childhood development. Suppose a child’s parents profess to be loving, so loving that they never allow the child to make choices for himself. They keep him confined in a basement, making every decision for him, including what he eats, wears, watches, and where he goes. As he enters his teens and then adulthood, his loving parents continue protecting him and

forcing him to do what they think is best: he never makes a single decision. These parents are eventually arrested and brought into court, and their lawyer tells the jury that all of their actions sprang from love: the confinement, forced diet, and absence of choices. How convincing will this “loving” motive be to a jury? These parents will be convicted of wrongful imprisonment (and more), because their “love” robbed their child of choice and free will (Butt, *Atheism, God*).

Love requires **choices**: real choices. Real choices require the potential of **wrong** choices, otherwise the choice is only an illusion. God has no pleasure when souls choose wickedness or when the wicked face the consequences of their decisions (Eze. 18:23). Nevertheless, God loves souls enough to let them choose whether to love Him or to leave Him.

*The Reality Of Hell Does Not Negate God's Love That Shows Men Their Worth*

The Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, has several words that can be translated “love.” *Thelo* is a strong desire or disposal (Mark 12:38), like loving steak or baseball. *Eros* is physical love, pertaining to attraction and intimacy: the word is not in the New Testament, but the idea is (Heb. 13:4). *Storge* is the familial love that exists between parents and children, husbands and wives, and between God's children (Rom. 12:10). *Philia* is friendship love based on commonality and camaraderie: Peter expressed this for Jesus (John 21:13-17). Then there is *agape*, which Strong's describes as “love (in a social or moral sense).” *Agape* has been called selfless love, and so it is, for it is the “charity” Paul described to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13).

A distinction exists between *agape* with *philia*: whereas *philia* involves “affection for” and “personal

attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling” and is “chiefly of the heart,” *agape* “is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will” and is chiefly “of the head” (Strong’s, “Phileo”).

*Agape* is a matter of the head (mind) involving “judgment and the deliberate assent of the will.” *Agape* is more of a decision than an emotion. *Agape* is a **choice** based upon a **judgment!** *Agape* evaluates the potential object of love and concludes, “I love you because you are worth it!”

God is *agape* (1 John 4:8). “For God so loved the world” speaks of *agape* (John 3:16). The Father saw souls as worth giving His Son in order to save them. God wants people to love Him in the same way: “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart, and with all of thy soul, and with all of thy mind” (Mat. 22:37). To love God is to decide, “God is worth it.” Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Heaven’s inhabitants will be there because they loved God, realized that He is worth obeying, and loved Him to the end (2 Tim. 4:8). Those outside of heaven will be absent, not because God ignored their worth, but because they never acknowledged God’s worth, never saw Him as worth obeying, and continued denying His worth to their final breath. “To deny eternal punishment under the banner of God’s love and mercy is to miss the point of God’s love and mercy” (South 502-503).

Hell’s existence is perfectly consistent with God’s love. In His love God provides every opportunity for souls to be saved from hell, allows each soul to make his own choice, and shows souls what they are worth to Him while allowing them to determine for themselves whether He is worth following.

***The Horrors Of Hell Are Morally Consistent With God’s Justice  
The Justice Of God Is Not Negated By Punishment***

God is fair. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne" (ASV, Psa. 89:14). "Righteousness" is doing what is morally right (Strong's, "Tsedeq"). "Justice" is pronouncing a sentence or formal decree based upon a legal standard (Strong's, "Mishpat"): thus justice issues the penalty or reward required by law. If God's throne is founded on justice, and if justice punishes per a legal standard, then God would not be God if He **did not** punish wickedness. As Moses sang, "for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deu. 32:4). God does what is right, what is fair, and what is deserved.

Guilty men have disliked the idea of fairness and justice throughout time, for the guilty do not want what they deserve. Guilty of murder, Cain questioned the severity of his sentence, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). Was Cain right to ignore the severity of his crime? Was he fair in viewing himself as victim instead of offender? To ask is to answer, yet the same "logic" is utilized by the disputants of God's justice today. If dispensing justice makes God the offender and man the victim, then all jailed rapists are victims and all judges who sentenced them are criminals.

Justice demands punishment. Suppose a judge oversees the trial of a remorseless man who entered a school, shot and killed a dozen people, was taken at the scene with weapon in hand, and dozens of eyewitnesses and video footage attest to his guilt. The jury finds him guilty. Would the judge be just if, after hearing the verdict, he decided that because he is a loving judge, and despite the jury's verdict and the man's lack of remorse, he would commute the sentence and let the man walk free? How long would such a judge occupy the bench (Butt, *Atheism, God*)? No one, believer or skeptic, can rightly suggest that punishment is

inconsistent with true justice.

Justice demands punishment. However, when a justice system allows guilt to be absolved by meeting stipulated requirements for a specific crime (prison sentence, community service, counseling, etc.), the potential exists for the offender to be free again. In such a case, even though the offender would eventually be free, the judge would still be just because he adhered to the system of justice required by the law (Butt, *Atheism, God*).

Justice demands punishment. Every sin is ultimately a crime against God (Psa. 51:4). “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Sin is the violation of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Sin is unrighteousness (1 John 5:17). Sin and unrighteousness can neither inhabit nor inherit God’s kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). The sinful and unrighteous will receive the wages of impenitent sin: “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). Justice demands a penalty, otherwise injustice rules. The price and penalty of sin is death, physically and spiritually. Justice demands punishment, and justice for sin demands death.

The “wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). God in His justice has given man a way to die to sin instead of dying in sin, sending Jesus to “taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). Guilty man can be absolved of sin, but only through the blood of Jesus (Acts 4:12). God’s justice is only appeased when a soul puts on Christ.

God is just. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). “He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Therefore, since God has declared that sin is only remitted through the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:12), for God to save any soul apart from Christ would be for Him to deny Himself and fall short of the Bible’s description of Him. God loves each soul, but each soul must

be in Christ to be saved.

By disputing the severity of God's punishment, Cain minimized the severity of his crime. So it is with those who contest hell as an unjust arrangement: they minimize the severity of the crime of sin. "Those who argue that a 'loving God' cannot punish impenitent sinners for eternity, simply have neglected to realize the heinousness of sin" (Lyons and Butt). "The truth is that the modern rejection of the doctrine of God's wrath proceeds from a light view of sin which is totally at variance with the teaching of the whole New Testament and of Jesus Himself" (Machen 111). "Those who understand hell best," wrote Challies, "those who grasp it most deeply, are those with the greatest sense that they deserve to be there."

No man could ask to be judged more fairly than to stand before the "righteous Judge" (2 Tim. 4:8), a Judge who knows the whole truth (Heb. 4:13), and one who knows the hearts of all men (Act 1:24). God's judgments are perfect: there are no mistrials or false convictions.

*The Justice Of God Is Not Negated By Eternal Punishment*

Most skeptics will concede that justice demands punishment, but then the argument turns to the duration of hell. The reply will essentially be, "OK, I believe that justice demands punishment, but **eternal** punishment?" (Butt, *Atheism, God*). Why does God not just punish the lost for a short period of time? How is it just for Him to punish souls eternally?

Some professed members of the Lord's church are bothered by hell's eternity:

I also wonder if you feel as uncomfortable as I do in our traditional view of hell. Do you readily accept the traditional view of hell that says God sort of dangles you over

the fires that burn day and night?...Is that what hell is all about? Haven't you struggled with the idea of how there can be a loving God and anywhere in his presence permit that to exist? Doesn't it seem like cruel and unusual punishment? (Smith, *A Christian Response*)

Smith would proceed to suggest that the “everlasting punishment” of Matthew 25:46 does not apply to the duration but to the source, punishment coming from God. Edward Fudge asserted that “everlasting punishment” was a description of the result of the punishment, not the punishment itself, and concluded that souls are eventually annihilated in hell. The problem with these arguments is Jesus applied the same duration to “everlasting (*aionion*) punishment” as He did to “life eternal (*aionion*)” (Mat. 25:46). “There is not the slightest indication in the words of Jesus here that the punishment is not coeval with the life” (Robertson). Some claim Jesus taught annihilation when He spoke of God being “able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28), but this assumes that “destroy” means “annihilate,” which is incorrect: “The idea is not extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (Vine 164). Hermeneutical gymnastics and doctrinal acrobatics are required to claim that Hell’s agonies are only temporary, and such stretches and leaps show how far some will go to reject Scripture’s simple descriptions of an eternal hell.

On Wednesday September 22, 1976, Thomas Warren presented Antony Flew with ten questions in mutually-agreed format prior to their third night of debate. Question #4 asked, “True or False. It is not possible that the justice of God could entail *any* punishment for sin” (Warren 140). To this Flew answered “False,” indicating that God’s justice **could** entail

punishment. Question #5 asked, "True or False. It is possible that this infinite justice of God might entail at least one minute of punishment when this life is over." Flew replied in the affirmative, stating that it was true that God's justice might involve a minute of punishment after this life ends.

Warren noted that Flew's replies admitted God could punish souls for a minute after death and "the basic concept of God would not be self-contradictory" (Warren 150). He proceeded,

What about two minutes, Dr. Flew? What about three minutes, four minutes, an hour, a day, a year, a month, a hundred years, a million years? Where do you stop? Would a billion years be long enough? Could God punish a man a billion years and still be just and loving? You can see that he has given up tonight...He has shown his inability to answer these questions in harmony with the atheistic position and the implications which follow from it. He himself is on record as saying when a man cannot do that, then it is clear that he holds a false position. (Warren 150)

Warren's point? Man is **finite** in judgment with a limited scope of knowledge, but the God of the Bible has infinite knowledge and thus is **infinite** in judgment. Once a finite man admits the propriety of God exacting **any** punishment, regardless of duration, what part of **justice** says that the punishment could not be one minute longer, two minutes longer, and onward to eternity? When the atheist concedes that God could punish sin for at least one minute after death, the question then becomes, "Who is in the best



position to determine how long punishment should be? Would it not be a righteous judge who knew every detail of the crime, including the thoughts and intents of the criminal? God is exactly that” (Lyons and Butt).

Justice not only permits punishment, it demands it. God’s infinite justice requires the possibility of infinite punishment. An eternal hell does not contradict the justice of God.

*The Justice Of God Is Not Negated By Eternal Punishment For A Finite Life*

At times, man will question, “Is it possible that the sins committed in the limited time of a short life can incur a punishment of unlimited time?” Life is short (Job 14:1; Jam. 4:14). Eternity lasts forever. How is that fair?

Perhaps a better question is, “How is that unfair?” There are generally four “determining factors in deciding the term and severity of the punishment” for the violation of law: “(a) the greatness, goodness, and majesty of the authority violated in the transgression, (b) the design of the transgressor, (c) the deliberation with which the offense was committed, and (d) the results of the transgression” (Winkler 46). The time required to commit the offense is not one of them.

When has the punishment for an offense ever been limited by the time it takes to commit the offense? Is it unjust for a first-time DUI offender, who in the space of one hour got drunk and then opted to drive, to be remanded to forty hours of community service?

What if a man lives a law-abiding life for seventy years, and then one day decides to abandon the rules, goes to the local Chevron, shoots and kills a family of four at the slushy machine, goes to the counter and shoots the clerk, empties the register, and as he leaves he plows his vehicle

through a group of elementary school children crossing the street, killing nine of them, and it all takes two minutes? When this man is arrested, tried, and convicted, does the time required to commit the crime become part of the consideration of his sentence? It only took two minutes, so his sentence should be short despite the fourteen funerals, right? (see Butt, *Atheism, God*).

Would an unbeliever reasonably agree that this man deserved to be imprisoned for the rest of his life for a crime that only took two minutes? Absolutely. Suppose he was only twenty-five years old: would it still be just to sentence him to life in prison for such wanton mayhem? Again, the answer is yes. (Considering his crime, it could Biblically be argued that he deserved a death sentence (Gen. 9:6; Rom. 13:3-4)). Whereas a prolonged timeframe of criminal behavior would likely **increase** a sentence, a short timeframe to commit a crime does not reduce the severity or consequences of the crime.

“Once a person admits that the punishment can last longer than the crime, it is simply a matter of who gets to decide how long the punishment should be” (Lyons and Butt). Why is forever too long? How long is too long to punish a child molester or serial rapist? Should it be a hundred years? Maybe a thousand years? “It soon becomes obvious that determinations of ‘too long’ are arbitrarily made by those...who want to reject the God of the Bible or...the hell of the Bible” (Lyons and Butt).

The “hell is too long” argument is an effective appeal to human emotions and sympathies, but it falls flat when viewed in light of heaven’s reward. “Who would argue that heaven cannot be eternal because God would be unjust to reward us for ‘too long’?” (Lyons and Butt). If it is fair for God to let souls into heaven eternally, it is fair for Him to let

them into eternal hell.

***The Horrors Of Hell Are Morally Consistent With Man's Liberty***

Love demands the liberty to choose. Justice demands the liberty to choose. When it comes to eternity, do men have the liberty to choose, or is God unloving and unjust? Recall how Flew charged God with creating souls “with the intention, that these creatures should be maintained by His sustaining power eternally in infinite and unlimited torment.” Templeton said hell was for those who “don’t obey [God] and do what he wants” (Strobel 173). Barker maligned God as a “dictator” for “sending someone like me to hell” (Butt and Barker). Such reasoning shackles responsibility for a soul’s eternal abode squarely onto God, faulting God’s intent, God’s desires, and God’s actions of “sending” souls to hell. Whose fault is it that lost souls will be in hell?

*God Gives To Each Soul The Liberty To Choose*

God wants men to choose to live for Him. Moses presented the options, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life” (Deu. 30:19). Joshua emphasized the choice: “Choose ye this day whom ye will serve” (Jos. 24:15). Jesus preached, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Mat. 7:13). Each man’s eternal destiny is for him to decide.

Skeptics will assert that God’s infinite foreknowledge should have kept Him from creating those who would refuse to follow Him so that they would not choose hell. “An adequate response to such a statement is simply, ‘Who says?’ Is there anything about the skeptic’s charge that shows some type of inherent moral rightness? There is nothing” (Butt, “Why Did God”). How fair would God be if He did **not** create such individuals? Would that not rob those souls of the freedom to choose just because God already knew they would

choose hell? Would not this make God partial, which would be a violation of His nature (Act 10:34)? God's willingness to create souls despite knowing their bad choices is a manifestation of His fairness, not unfairness.

God has been accused of "sending" souls to hell, but is that really the case? Does God send souls to hell, or do souls choose to go there? Dan Barker defiantly wrote, "Speaking for myself, if the biblical heaven and hell exist, I would choose hell. Having to spend eternity pretending to worship a petty tyrant who tortures those who insult his authority would be more hellish than baking in eternal flames. There is no way such a bully can earn my admiration" (Barker 170).

Mr. Barker said he "would choose hell." What should God do? Should God swoop down with a chariot of fire and carry Mr. Barker into everlasting joys before the man has a chance to die lost? Is God going to make any soul go to heaven? Heaven is a place of rest, celebration, rejoicing, and light, and all centered around the presence of Almighty God (Rev. 20:4; Rev. 20:23). In God's presence there is no place for anything defiled, desecrated, or dishonest (Rev. 20:27). Heaven is a place for those who want to be with God (Rev. 20:3). Would heaven truly be heaven if it were populated with defiant souls who spent their lives and energies shouting, "Heaven, no, we won't go!"?

J. Vernon McGee declared, "Don't say that a loving God is going to send you to hell—He's not. The thing that's going to send you to hell is that you're a sinner and you don't want to admit it." In the words of Josh McDowell, "First of all God doesn't send anyone to hell. If we go to hell, it's by our own choice." G.K. Chesterton called hell "God's great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice."

Christopher Love noted, “If the Lord should bring a wicked man to heaven, heaven would be hell to him; for he who loves not grace upon earth will never love it in heaven.”

Does God “send” souls to hell? Let men stop blaming God for their personal choices.

*God Gives To Each Soul The Consequences Of His Choices*

Actions have consequences. The consequences are based on the laws of God. A child may not realize the danger of slipping a fork into a power receptacle, but the consequences are still the same. A man who chooses the action of infidelity in his marriage does not get to choose the consequences when his affair is discovered. Adam and Eve did not get to design the consequences for eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3). Cain did not get to choose his consequences after murdering his brother (Gen. 4). A person who commits sin does not get to dictate what the consequences of sin ought to be.

In what legal system do the guilty get to dictate the severity and duration of their sentences? Should an offender guilty of dispensing **injustice** be allowed to decide how **justice** applies to him? Spiritually speaking, man is the offender (sinner): “how can a miserable human who is guilty of sin—spiritual crimes—tell the God who made him how long punishment can continue without becoming unloving? God forbid that we should be so presumptuous!” (Edwards 189).

Hell is not a matter of God torturing anyone. The pains of hell are self-inflicted. Choices have consequences. Sin has consequences. A soul may not forthrightly declare to “choose hell” as did Dan Barker, but choosing to live in sin brings the same outcome.

*God Gives To Each Soul An Emotional Appeal To Make The Right Choice*

God wants none to be lost, but He cannot make them be saved. All He can do is show them the scope of His love and give them the opportunity to “love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The magnitude of God’s love was manifested in Jesus’ sacrifice (1 John 4:9-10).

The Hebrews writer asked a powerful question: “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:28-29). Sore punishment awaits those who walk this road, for they insult the Spirit of Grace, they count the sanctifying blood of Jesus’ covenant as worthless, and they trample “under foot the Son of God.” These are souls walking toward destruction, and since God wants none to be lost, what has He done? God has placed something in the path to capture their eyes, turn their emotions, and save their souls: the Son of God. Those who continue marching toward punishment are trampling Jesus underfoot. It is as though God has said, “You can choose the road to hell, but it will be over My dead body” (Butt, *Atheism, God*). What more powerful persuasion could God supply?

Those who choose to ignore the evidence for a Creator and thus not seek Him, or who choose to ignore the instructions of the Creator and thus not follow Him, have chosen to separate themselves from all that is good. When a person leaves this life maintaining the decision to live separate from God, God will not violate that soul’s free will. Whereas some physical pleasures could be found during a physical life apart from God, in eternity all that is good (rest, comfort, peace, joy) is in God’s presence. What options are left for a person’s eternal existence when that soul chooses to

be separate from all that is good?

“There are only two kinds of people in the world in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘*Thy* will be done’” (Lewis 139).

### **Assisting The Argument**

Those who believe what God teaches about hell must not fuel the fire of atheism’s argument by using false doctrine, flawed exegesis, or faulty philosophies.

The false doctrine of Calvinism has no answer to the atheist’s argument. Calvinism teaches that God is a biased respecter of persons who arbitrarily chooses some to salvation and others to the damnation of hell. This is unjust, unloving, and devoid of liberty. Calvinistic apologists responding to atheists’ arguments about hell find themselves talking in circles in order to defend the idea of God’s existence while maintaining their Calvinist bent. Only the devil smiles at this.

New Testament Christians must be careful about giving flawed descriptions of hell. Hell is repeatedly described as a place of punishment (Mat. 25:46; 2 Pet. 2:9; 2 The. 1:9; Heb. 10:29), but it is not a place of **corrective** punishment. Let saints be wary of comparing parental love of corrective discipline with the punitive nature of hell: parents chasten their children “while there is hope” (Pro. 19:18), but hell is a place of no hope. Hell is the final abode of those who ultimately rejected God, therefore God “gave them up” (Rom. 1:24). Hell is not a correctional facility with hope of rehabilitation. Hell is a place for souls who refuse rehabilitation.

Hell is also not a place designed to deter human behavior which God dislikes. Granted, the potential of hell serves as quite the deterrent, but Jesus declared unequivocally that hell was made “for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Hell was never intended to be a “threat of violence” to

make man behave: it is simply the polar opposite of heaven.

Refried exegesis is likewise dangerous. It is true that God's mind is beyond man's investigative ability (Rom. 11:33-35), but this is not the teaching of Isaiah 55:8-9. God called upon the wicked to forsake their ways and for the unrighteous man to forsake his thoughts, and to return to the Lord, **because** their ways and thoughts were not God's ways and thoughts (Isa. 55:7-8). The point was that **they should have been!** What they needed to do was to let God's Word do what He sent it to do (Isa. 55:9-11). The same is true as it pertains to understanding hell: while man cannot know the facets of hell that God has not divulged (Deu. 29:29), he can have sufficient understanding of hell based on what God **has** shared in His Word.

Gospel preachers and Christian teachers give place to the devil when they approach the topic of hell as though it is taboo. "In the apparent absence of teaching on hell, heaven is losing its attraction, and the passing pleasures of earth are taking precedence" (McDade 32).

Modern society has become progressively skewed in recent years. America has become a country whose justice system reinterprets and reinvents law instead of enforcing and reinforcing it. Secular humanists have effectively injected their philosophies into modern thought, and the result is a society that too often views criminals as victims and victims as criminals. When saints subscribe to this backward logic, calling good evil and evil good (Isa. 5:20), they find themselves compromising with atheism's arguments instead of standing on a "Thus saith the Lord." Instead of lamenting that souls break God's heart by choosing hell, they begin lamenting that God punishes souls so cruelly and then seek ways to redefine hell. They confuse victim for offender!



### Conclusion

“Hell is a real place where men always die, yet never die; never live, yet always live! Hell is a real place where men live forever, but where there is no hope for which to live. The wretchedness of that state no tongue can exaggerate; it defies exaggeration. It will never, never end!” (Winkler 46-47).

The Bible’s description of God is consistent, coherent, and cogent. The same can be said for the Biblical description of hell. There exists no contradiction with God’s morality, God’s love, God’s justice, or God’s allowance of human free will. Those who have the most trouble understanding hell are those who have the most trouble understanding God.

Some assert that they want nothing to do with a God that would allow for eternal torment, indicating that they would only submit to a “god” that was more like them instead of making themselves more like God. Where does this reasoning end? It is demanding that Deity conform to man’s will. He who argues this in eschatology will use the same reasoning in worship, salvation, and any other area of faith! It becomes all about man’s will, not God’s!

Thank God that a man does not only get a reward for as long as he serves God! Thank God that He lets men make their own decisions about where they will spend eternity!

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## **My Children: Provoke Not Wrath, But Bring Them Up In The Nurture And Admonition Of The Lord**

*Steve Higginbotham*



Steve Higginbotham was born in Chester, West Virginia. He and his wife, Kim, are the parents of four children: Kelli, Michael, Matthew, and Anne Marie. Steve graduated from Freed-Hardeman University with a B.S. in Bible and is presently working on a Master in Ministry degree from Freed-Hardeman University. He has served congregations in West Virginia and Kentucky.

Steve presently serves as the pulpit minister for the Karns congregation in Knoxville, Tennessee and also serves as an adjunct faculty member of Southeast Institute of Bible Studies.

On the evening of February 29, 1988 (leap year day), my life changed forever. It was on this date that my wife brought into this world our first child. I'll never forget the excitement, joy, and relief we experienced that night.

After all our phone calls to friends and family, after counting her fingers and toes and being amazed at the dimples in her cheeks, it was time for my wife and daughter to get some sleep and for me to return home. I left the hospital at around 3:00 a.m. and drove home on a nearly empty highway. That's when it hit me! I was a father! Oh, I knew I was going to be a father. I had spent the last nine months planning and preparing for this day. But after all the frenzy and adrenalin were gone, and I was in my car all alone, the weight of my parental responsibility hit me like a ton of bricks. I was so shaken by the sudden realization that I was now responsible for another human being, I almost had to pull off to the side of the road and gather my composure. I was trying to take in

the fact that God had entrusted my wife and me with an eternal soul.

To an extent larger than I even realized that evening, my wife and I would be the greatest factor in determining whether our little girl would be in heaven or hell throughout eternity. Therefore, the apostle Paul instructs parents, specifically fathers, in the following way, “And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (NKJV, Eph. 6:4).

A cursory examination of our culture today would cause one to conclude that mothers and fathers have failed to take Paul’s instruction seriously. I frequently hear people rail about the juvenile delinquency they see in our culture; the real issue is not juvenile delinquency but rather parental delinquency. Children aren’t being taught how to behave. They aren’t being taught morals, and their parents aren’t spending enough time with them to instill a Christian value system.

I remember hearing several years ago about the Prime Minister of Great Britain being frustrated with the hatred and violence between the Jews and Arabs. He allegedly said, “Why can’t the Jews and Arabs just sit down at a table and work out their problems like good Christians?” Well, the answer to that question is easy enough: because they aren’t Christians! It is unreasonable to expect people who are not Christians to behave like Christians. Likewise, it is just as unreasonable to expect young people to grow up and be good Christians when they get older when their parents have never instilled Christian values within them.

God knew the connection between early, consistent spiritual education and outcome. He said:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord  
is one! You shall love the Lord your God

with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 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, and 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. 6:4-9)

The environment the Lord described in the above passage is one in which the children in the home would constantly be reminded of the will of God. Several years ago, we bought a home from a Jewish family. When we took possession of the house, we noticed a strange little box nailed to the doorpost of our front door. This box had a door on it, and inside the box was a copy of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The box, which is called a mezuzah, was strategically placed right at eye level so that as you entered and left the house, you were reminded of the Word of God.

The fact is that whether you were a part of Old Testament Israel or are a part of the New Testament church, God expects you to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The following are some concrete examples of how we can do that.

### **Teach Your Children The Word Of God**

The psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). This truth is the very reason we should teach our children the Word of God. It gives direction to their lives and enables them to discern between

right and wrong. In this same chapter the psalmist asked the question, “How can a young man cleanse his way?” (Psa. 119:9a). Then he answered his own question, “By taking heed according to your word” (Psa. 119:9b).

It’s one thing to have a Bible, but the Word needs to get off of the page and into the hearts of our children. Again, the psalmist said, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psa. 119:11). Our children won’t always have their Bibles in their hands and, even if they did, they may not know where to turn for an answer. But if we help them to put the Word in their hearts through study and memorization, they will forevermore have a ready answer to some of life’s most perplexing questions. It was Scripture that Jesus used to overcome the temptations of the devil (Mat. 4:4), and it is the Scripture that will enable our children to overcome the many temptations to sin.

I know the Bible is a “big book,” but it is well within our ability to master if we are motivated. When I turned sixteen years old, I wanted my driver’s license more than anything in the world. So, several months before my sixteenth birthday, I got a copy of the state’s driver’s manual and studied it thoroughly. I knew everything in the book. I could tell you the stopping distance at fifty-five miles per hour on ice, snow, and rain. I knew the meaning of every road sign and, in fact, I even memorized the names of the Secretary of Transportation and the publisher of the driver’s manual! I was not going to be denied. Why? Because it was the most important thing in my life at that time.

My point in sharing that with you is this: if wanting heaven for your children really means the world to you, then you will spend the time necessary in putting the Word of God in the hearts of your children. Saying, “I want my children to go to heaven more than anything in this world” is the right



thing to say, but due to the biblical illiteracy I see in some children, I'm not sure it is the true thing to say.

### **Let Your Children See You Live The Word Of God**

Failing to practice what we preach will result in God's name being blasphemed. Paul said:

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 as it is written. (Rom. 2:21-24)

Our children see us and know us well. They spent enough time with us to know whether our talk of the Lord is genuine or not. It will not take them long to determine if our relationship with the Lord is just "talk" or if it is authentic. We can teach them the Word of God, but it will do little good if we, as their parents, do not live out that Word before them. Our children need to see us live out the Word that we teach them.

Several years ago, I discussed Christian ethics at the dinner table with our youngest son who was in fourth grade at the time. He had benefited on a homework grade because his teacher had overlooked a mistake he had made on one of his questions. My wife and I explained how he would want the teacher to correct the mistake if it wasn't in his favor; therefore, it was only fair that he inform his teacher of the

mistake that was not in his favor.

This was not an easy task to give a young boy, to tell his teacher that he had made a mistake, and further, a mistake that would lower his grade...but to his credit, he saw the issue at stake, and he did the right thing the next day. It wasn't so much about a ninety-four or a ninety-two percent on a homework assignment, but it was about discipleship, following Jesus, and doing the right thing no matter what.

Now, for the rest of the story...you know, it's rather difficult to teach someone else to do right when you aren't doing right yourself. The discussion we had with our son, the logic we used, and the Scriptural principle to “provide all things honest in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17) convicted me. You see, just a day earlier I discovered, after driving away from the drive-through window at Burger King, that they had given me eleven cents too much in change. At the time, my mind went back to all the times they had messed up my order and didn't give me what I had asked for, so I drove on.

However, the courage and the code of ethics possessed by our little ten-year-old boy emboldened me to drive back to the Burger King drive-through and return eleven cents to the cashier. I also wanted to make sure my son knew his action helped to remind me what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and that I took back the eleven cents I had in my pocket.

Someone might be tempted to say, “It was just eleven cents!” But those who say that couldn't be more wrong! It was so much more than eleven cents. It was my integrity at stake. We need to let our children see that we live out what we preach. When our children hear us say, “Nothing should come before our relationship with God,” they hear the right words, but do they see us consistently living this out?

There is an Old Testament passage that uses two

expressions I would like to borrow for the sake of illustration. In Genesis 12:8, it says that Abraham “pitched his tent” and he “built an altar to the Lord.” I think the verbs are interesting. Abraham “pitched” his tent. In other words, it wasn’t a permanent structure. It could be picked up and moved if need be. But Abraham didn’t “pitch” his altar, he “built” it. In other words, it was permanently placed—a fixture. If I could use this as an allegory, I think this passage identifies one of our largest problems today. Many people are doing the exact opposite of what Abraham did. They are “pitching” their altars and “building” their tents.

In our culture, little deference is given to church. Ball games, practices, band, school functions, etc., are scheduled without any regard for church attendance. So, what happens when our “home life” conflicts with our “church life?” Which one gets moved? Could it be that our religious life is “pitched” and our home/social life is what is “built?” And if that is a fair conclusion, do we think our children don’t notice this? Of course they do.

Our children need to have some “Mt. Moriah experiences.” What do I mean by that? Well, in Genesis 22, Abraham took his son, Isaac, up on Mt. Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice. Have you ever considered the scene? Do you think Abraham shed tears as he was building that altar? Do you think Isaac resisted and had to be subdued? Do you think Abraham saw the look of fear in Isaac’s eyes? What a dramatic and emotional test of Abraham’s faithfulness. While we know that God stopped the hand of Abraham and Isaac was spared, do you think that Isaac ever forgot that day? Don’t you imagine that this day would have forever been burned into the memory of Isaac? And what was the memory with which he would have been left? That his father loved God supremely!

My question is this: what Mt. Moriah experiences are we creating for our children? What are we doing or have we done that will burn a memory into the minds of our children so that long after we are dead and gone, they will never question our loyalty to God because they remember the time when...

If you haven't created such an experience for your children, plan one. Get together and brainstorm. Intentionally plan and do something that will forever be a reminder to your children that you love God supremely, and that you don't just **preach** the Word, but you **live** it too.

### **Teach Your Children The Beauty Of Holiness**

The psalmist said, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psa. 96:9). If we want to prepare our children for heaven, we need to teach them to value holiness. The writer of Hebrews said we must "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

It's not hard to talk about how good God is. It's easy to make a list of His character traits that are easy to love, (e.g., grace, forgiveness, patience, love, kindness, etc.) What is there not to love about this? But I am convinced that it is much easier to find one hundred people who love God than it is to find one hundred people who hate sin. But that's precisely what we are called to do, and our personal holiness is at stake. "Abhor that which is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9).

Many Christians today are trying to live compartmentalized lives. On one hand, they love God, go to church, and claim to be disciples, but on the other hand, they engage in worldly things that grieve God. This dichotomy is lived in the television shows we watch, the movies we attend, the music we listen to, and the things we "like" on social

media. We seem to be trying to walk with one foot on the earth and the other foot in heaven. But holiness demands more than just loving good; it also demands we hate or abhor evil! Teach your children the value and the absolute necessity of holiness in their lives.

It is easy to look at our culture and see the moral degradation of our society. We can cluck our tongues and shake our heads at what we see and hear on the news, but let's at least be honest with ourselves. The moral problems we face are not the fault of our youth, but of their parents who have largely failed them. Listen to the powerful words of this poem, "Don't Blame the Children," written by Opel Sink:

We read in the papers and hear on the air  
of killing and stealing and crimes everywhere.  
We sigh and we say as we notice the trend  
"This young generation, where will it end?"

But can we be sure it is their fault alone  
that maybe a part of it isn't our own?  
Are we less guilty who place in their way  
so many things that lead them astray?

Too much money to spend, too much idle time,  
Too many movies of passion and crime.  
Too many books not fit to be read,  
Nobody home when it's time for the bed.

Too many children encouraged to roam  
by too many parents who won't stay at home.  
Kids don't make the movies, they don't write the books,  
that paint gay pictures of gangsters and crooks.

They don't make the liquor, they don't run the bars,

they don't make the law, they don't buy the cars.  
They don't peddle the drugs that addle the brain,  
that's all done by older folks greedy for gain.

Delinquent teenagers, oh how we condemn them!  
The sins of the nation, we blame all on them.  
The laws of the blameless-the Savior made known,  
who is there among us to cast the first stone?

For, in so many cases, it's sad but its [sic] true,  
the title "delinquent" fits older folks too.

“Children are a heritage of the Lord” (Psa. 127:3). No greater responsibility will one ever be given than to be given the gift of a child. The child you hold in your arms is on loan from God. He eventually wants that child back. And if through our negligence that child does not return to God, we must give an account before God. Let these words of Jesus serve as a sober warning and motivation to us all to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

“Then he said to the disciples, ‘it is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones’” (Luke 17:1-3).

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## The Soul Of Man

*Denny Petrillo*



Denny is married to the former Kathy Roberts. They have been married since January, 1978. They have three children (Lance, Brett, and Laura), and five grandchildren (Chloe, Ashlyn, Sophie, Easton, and Brelyn). He has served as the president of the Bear Valley Bible Institute since 2004 and has been a full-time instructor since 1985. He has preached in Mississippi, Arkansas, Nebraska, and Colorado. He has taught numerous classes for the World Video Bible School and has authored several books and commentaries. He graduated from Bear Valley School of Preaching (now Bear Valley Bible Institute) and has also received an A.A. degree in Bible (York College in York, Nebraska), B.A. in Bible and Biblical Languages (Harding University), M.A. in Old and New Testaments (Harding Graduate School of Religion), and a Ph.D. in Religious Education (University of Nebraska).

“We see,” the teacher explained, “that when God created man, He put something special in him that was not given to other creatures! He gave Him a living soul!” The passage we were studying was Genesis 2:7 out of the King James Version.

As I grew older, I discovered that this was not what Genesis 2:7 was teaching. The concept was not unscriptural; it simply was not what this particular passage was teaching.

A Biblical study of the word “soul,” can be a perplexing one. We are prone to want one basic meaning to a word, and whenever that word occurs, we can apply that one basic meaning. Yet we do not have such a luxury with the word “soul.” In a 1980 *Gospel Advocate* article, Guy N. Woods gave a great illustration:

Were I, in conversation with you, to use the word *apple* you are at once able to conjure up in mind the fruit by this name and you are not dependent on my usage of the word to ascertain its meaning. But, were I to ask, “Define the word *bark* for me,” you could not possibly know whether I mean by it the sound a dog makes or the outer covering of a tree! However, should I say, “Bark is thicker this winter than usual,” you are able with ease to gather the meaning of the term from the context in which I have used it. (163)

The Biblical word “soul,” demands that it be considered in the context in which it occurs. It is such a flexible word that it can be applied in many different ways. Each of these ways will be considered below, followed by some important applications that we should make.

### **The Varied Meanings Of The Word “Soul”**

The word “soul” typically comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh* (sometimes simply spelled *nepes*). Of this word Eduard Schweizer said that *nephesh* “is as hard to define as it is to translate owing to its fluid and dynamic aspect” (9:618). This word occurs more than seven hundred times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its Greek counterpart is *psyche*. This word occurs one hundred five times in the Greek New Testament. Of this word Walter Bauer observed: “It is often impossible to draw hard and fast lines in the use of this multivalent word” (1098). With the noted difficulty of translating each word, we will break it down to its most common meanings:

1. **Life.** Here the words convey the idea that without a



*nephesh/psyche* it would be impossible to live. This is true regarding humans (the previously referenced Gen. 2:7; 2 Sam. 1:9; Jer. 4:10; Mat. 2:20; Mat. 6:25; Mat. 20:28; Mark 3:4; Luke 14:26; Acts 20:10; Rom. 11:3; Phi. 2:30) and animals (Gen. 1:20-21; Gen. 1:24; Gen. 1:30; Gen. 9:10; Gen 9:12; Lev. 11:10; Lev. 11:46; Job 12:10; Eze. 47:9; Rev. 16:3). In this sense both man and animal share a common trait. We possess physical bodies, but without God infusing the body with this *nephesh/psyche* there would be no life. Jesus said, as the Good Shepherd, that He would lay down His life (*psyche*) for the sheep (John 10:11; cf. John 10:15; John 10:17).

2. **Inner self.** The literal meaning of *nephesh* is “throat.” When used in this sense it describes the part of a person (or animal) that thinks, feels, wills, and desires. “If it is your wish (*nephesh*) for me to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me” (NKJV, Gen. 23:8). The Bible says that Shechem “was deeply attracted (*nephesh*) to Dinah” (Gen. 34:3). It has the sense of “desire” (Exo. 15:9), or “feelings” (Exo. 23:9). Our souls can be “humbled” (Lev. 16:29; Lev. 16:31). The *nephesh* can be sad (Deu. 28:65; Psa. 119:28), grieved (Job 30:25), weep (Jer. 13:17), and even be in pain (Psa. 13:2). It can hate (2 Sam. 5:8; Psa. 11:5), love (1 Sam. 18:1; Ecc. 1:7), and rejoice (Psa. 35:9; Isa. 61:10). This is the most common usage in the Old Testament, with more than three hundred times where it is used in this way. In the New Testament, the word *psyche* can refer to one’s inner thoughts and feelings. Jesus said that “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:34). When He commanded that men love

God “with all your soul” (Luke 10:27), He was using the word *psyche* in this sense. Our love for God should come from deep within, a genuine and legitimate love.

3. **Persons/people.** Numerous times the word *nephesh* simply refers to people. When the king of Sodom was talking to Abram, he said “Give me the persons (*nephesh*), and take the goods for yourself” (Gen. 14:21). Genesis 46 frequently refers to the “persons” (or people – *nephesh*) that belonged to Jacob (cf. Exo. 1:5; Exo. 12:15; Exo 31:14; Lev. 5:1-4). Numbers 31:19 talks about anyone who “has killed any person (*nephesh*).” This same sense is also found in the New Testament with the word *psyche*. On the Day of Pentecost there were “about three thousand souls (*psyche*)” that were added to the Lord’s body (Acts 2:41). Later it talks about how “fear came upon every soul” (Acts 2:43). In speaking of the flood, Peter notes that there were “eight souls” that were saved (1 Pet. 3:20).
4. **An eternal but invisible feature unique to mankind.** This aspect of the word “soul” is not readily present in the Old Testament. The desire to live into eternity is present (cf. Ecc. 3:11) as is a recognition of a judgment day (Ecc. 12:13-14). However, the word *nephesh* is not used in the sense of something that God has given man that will live into eternity. As 2 Timothy 1:10 explains, it is Jesus that has “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” There are numerous times in the New Testament that the word *psyche* refers to our eternal soul. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus says: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who

is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Here we note several important truths:

- a. The soul is different from the body. Men can harm the body, but do not have the power to harm the soul.
- b. The soul, therefore, must be understood as something that is not physical; for man cannot touch it nor find it.
- c. God alone has power over both the body and the soul.
- d. The soul has the potential to be “destroyed” by God. This word (*apollymi*) does not suggest the false doctrine of annihilation. Rather, this word has the idea of being ruined, punished, crushed, or damaged. The soul was designed to be something precious and beautiful. If man corrupted his soul by sinful living, the soul is no longer precious and beautiful and will be punished by God.
- e. The soul can be sent to hell. It has the makeup and capability to suffer the consequences of going to this place of torment and condemnation. Equally, the soul is capable of going to a place of eternal reward.

In Revelation 6:9 John says: “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.” It is obvious that they are no longer alive physically, but are very much alive in a different form. When Jesus’ body went into the tomb, His soul lived on and was not abandoned in Hades (Acts 2:27; Acts 2:31).

Jesus made it clear that our souls are our most precious possession. In Matthew 16:26 He asked two

penetrating questions: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” From these questions we learn:

1. That the whole world and all of its wealth is not of equal value to one single soul.
2. One’s soul can be “lost.”
3. Each person has control over his soul and determines the eventual destiny of it. As we learned earlier (Mat. 10:28), one’s soul can find itself in hell. Instead of making the selfish choices of material gain and spiritual demise, we are given the opportunity to save our souls. In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter says that we have purified our souls by our obedience to the truth. This shows that we have defiled our souls through sinful conduct, but that we have the power to “purify” that soul when we obey the truth, the Gospel of Christ. When speaking of a man named Gaius, John observed “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” Here we see that it is possible for one’s soul to be different from one’s body (health) and that it is possible for one’s soul to “prosper” (grow and thrive; cf. Acts 14:22). The soul is so important that church leaders are given the task of watching over the souls in their charge (Heb. 13:17). The reason for this is because there are false teachers who can lead people’s souls into sin (2 Pet. 2:14; Acts 15:24). This is why God’s people need to be proactive in working with others, for in so doing they may save their souls from death (Jam. 5:20). Peter admonished the Christians by saying: “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing

good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19). The Hebrews writer stated: “But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). All of these passages indicate that there is a sense in which the Greek word *psyche* refers to man’s invisible, eternal soul.

### **Body, Soul, And Spirit**

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul makes the astounding but highly controversial statement: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This statement has been explained in six different ways:

1. Paul is simply describing the whole of a person, and not offering a technical division of the human makeup. “More recent scholars have come to view these terms in a more Hebraic fashion, recognizing them as differing perspectives on a single human reality. When placed alongside other aspects of the person, *psyche* may be seen as but one way of viewing the human life” (Robeck 4:588). This view argues that the same is said in familiar expressions like those found in Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (cf. Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). It is assumed that all three expressions say the same thing; that is, there is no discernable difference between loving God with the heart and the soul or with one’s strength. Yet there is certainly not universal agreement on that point. Many argue (this writer included) that there are differences between the three. Therefore, this first view is rejected. “It is contrary to Paul’s acknowledged careful use of words

- to attribute such a rhetorical device to him” (Thomas 294).
2. “Soul” and “spirit” are synonyms, often used interchangeably. “Body” presents the second aspect to man. Thus we are comprised of two principle parts: soul/spirit and body. Those arguing for this view point out the frequent dualism found in the New Testament (God/Satan, good/evil, light/darkness, etc.). It is also noted that Paul does the same thing in Philippians 1:27: “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit (*pneuma*), with one mind (*psyche*) striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Other passages used to support this viewpoint are 2 Cor. 7:1, 1 Cor. 5:3, and 3 John 2.
  3. The weakness in the above arguments is evident, however, because Paul sometimes parallels *pneuma* with *sarx* (“flesh,” “body”), with which it cannot be identical (2 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor.7:5; 2 Cor. 7:13). Clear-cut distinctions between *psyche* and *pneuma* indicate they cannot be used interchangeably (Cremer). In addition, it is doubtful whether Paul would pray for man’s functional capabilities, as this view holds, rather than two substantial parts of man’s make-up (Thomas 294).
  4. Paul actually is referencing the Holy Spirit. In a few verses earlier Paul cautioned them to not “quench the Spirit” (1 The. 5:19). Now (according to this theory) Paul has in mind the same Spirit and is encouraging the brethren to fully utilize that Spirit that they had been given.

This is definitely wrong, though we admit

that it is advanced by really great exegetes. Paul, Silas, and Timothy would not be expressing the wish that the Holy Spirit (or “a portion of the Holy Spirit”) might be kept sound and blameless! Nor would they be hoping that the third person of the Trinity might be without a flaw! (Hendriksen 146-147)

5. Some have tried to re-do the grammar of the verse in such a way that makes “soul” and “spirit” appear as synonyms. They will do something like “may your whole spirit” with “whole” being the word *psyche*. However, such an attempt is unjustified both grammatically and syntactically.
6. Paul sees man as having three distinct parts (known as *trichotomy*). This was the view accepted by the early Christian writers and for dozens of writers through the centuries. Only recently has this view been abandoned. However, there is much to offer in favor of this view. First, it is the most natural reading of the text. Paul here gives three nominative singular nouns, each with definite articles. He links all three words together with two “ands” (*kai*). Thus, the pure natural reading of the verse leads toward a trichotomy. Second, there are other texts that seem to indicate a distinction between one’s soul and spirit. The Hebrews writer says “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Third, some are determined to make Paul a dichotomist at all costs. It requires them to produce creative interpretations of

passages (such as this one) that clearly indicate a trichotomy. Fourth, those who argue against a trichotomous view do so because they believe it aligns Paul with Gnosticism or Greek psychology or even pagan thought. “A trichotomous understanding of 5:23 has so much to commend it that other interpretations cannot compete without summoning arguments from elsewhere. The difference between the material part (“body”) and the immaterial parts (“spirit” and “soul”) is obvious” (Thomas 294). Jack P. Lewis correctly stated “The ultimate description of man’s make-up is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23” (6).

### **What Is The Difference Between Soul And Spirit?**

It is beyond the scope of this study to engage in a thorough discussion of the word “spirit” (*ruach* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek). The word *ruach* is found three hundred seventy-six times in the Hebrew Old Testament, with a variety of meanings (wind, breath, transitoriness, volition, disposition, temper, spirit, Spirit) (VanGemeren 1073). The word *pneuma* is found three hundred seventy-nine times in the Greek New Testament with numerous meanings similar to those of the Old Testament (Bauer 832). As noted earlier, the soul is an eternal part of man that captures the spiritual essence of a person. The spirit is one’s life force. Without it, the physical body cannot survive (Acts 7:59; Luke 8:55). Nevertheless, the spirit “is the immortal nature—that portion of us derived directly from God, and not subject to death” (Woods 163). While there are some passages that seem to use the terms interchangeably, the vast majority of passages indicate a difference between the two. Hendriksen observes:

The question arises, Did Paul distinguish  
between πνεῦμα and ψυχή? The two words



have in common that both refer to the invisible element in man, viewed as the principle of thinking, willing, desiring. It must be granted that there are several passages in the New Testament where the distinction in meaning is so small that the two may be said to be interchangeable or nearly so. Nevertheless, close study of these terms in all their occurrences points to the fact that basically there is a distinction between them. Whenever this distinction has not yet faded away, it amounts to this, that when πνεῦμα is used mental activity comes into prominence, while ψυχή frequently points in the direction of emotional activity. It is the spirit (πνεῦμα) which perceives (Mark 2:8), plans (Acts 19:21), and knows (1 Cor. 2:11). It is the soul (ψυχή) that is sorrowful (Mat. 26:38). The spirit (πνεῦμα) prays (1 Cor. 14:14), the ψυχή loves (Mark 12:30). Also, ψυχή is often more general, broader in scope, indicating the sum-total of life which rises above the physical, while πνεῦμα is more restricted, indicating the human spirit in its relation to God, man's self-consciousness or personality viewed as the subject in acts of worship or in activities related to worship, such as praying, bearing witness, serving the Lord. (146-148)

Thomas makes the following analysis:

The spirit (*pneuma*) is the part that enables man to

perceive the divine. Through this component he can know and communicate with God. This higher element, though damaged through the fall of Adam, is sufficiently intact to provide each individual a consciousness of God. The soul (*psyche*) is the sphere of man's will and emotions. Here is his true center of personality. It gives him a self-consciousness that relates to the physical world through the body and to God through the spirit. This analysis of man had been Paul's training in the OT and no impressive evidence has surfaced to eradicate such a picture here. Yet, it must be confessed, much unresolved mystery remains regarding the interrelationships between man's different parts, including the body. How one affects the other is fully understood only by Him who is the Creator (295).

### **What Value Is There To Study The Word "Soul"?**

As we have briefly considered the varied ways the word "soul" is used in Scripture, it is important that we ask the all-important question: "so what?" Consider the following:

First, it is crucial that we understand our true makeup. Darwinian evolution has done a masterful job of dehumanizing us all. According to this widely embraced theory, we are nothing more than a micro-organism that through millions of years eventually evolved into our present form. There is nothing truly unique about us. Rather, we are just one more species out of hundreds of species. Like all creatures, we will grow old and die. When we die our existence is over. This life is all there is. Such a theory has infiltrated the thinking of so many, and has created a hopelessness and a view that life is pointless. Studying the word "soul," is vital to our achieving a correct understanding of ourselves. We are more than our "houses of clay." Our true

makeup is not found in skin color, height, or anything physical. Our earthly bodies are not us at all. Rather, we are eternal beings, designed by our Creator to be with Him forever.

Second, studying the word “soul” impacts the way we live our lives. If we believe that we have been given something that will last into eternity, it changes us. It humbles us. Knowing the everlasting quality of the soul, we are motivated to ask what condition our souls are in. We acknowledge that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and that there is none righteous (Rom. 3:10). Therefore, our souls have been stained by sin and can suffer eternal judgment from God (Mat. 10:28). Yet Jesus came to save our souls (1 Pet. 1:9). Through His work on the cross, those who were immersed in the waters of baptism on the day of Pentecost saved their “souls” (Acts 2:41). Those souls that were stained with sin can now be purified (1 Pet. 1:22). We will also have a balanced perspective on wealth. The rich fool thought that his acquiring many material possessions assured his “soul” of many good years to come. Yet the Judge said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you” (Luke 12:20). He did not live his life for God, but for self. This fateful decision will cost him for eternity. It will also motivate us to live our lives not where we fear men, who can only kill the body, rather than fear God, “who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat. 10:28).

Third, studying the word “soul” influences our doctrinal views. If we believe we are gifted with an eternal soul, we will want to engage that soul in meaningful worship. The Psalmist said, “To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul” (Psa. 25:1). We also will look at sins such as murder and abortion differently. This involves that taking of a life; a life that had been given an eternal soul by God Himself. It impacts the

way we see other people. In a world plagued with racism, we see all people as children of God. We are all equal, we all share the same sin problem, and we all share the same Savior in Jesus Christ. Knowing we have a soul, we will view Scripture differently. We will desire to base our lives on its teachings. James said clearly that it is “the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam. 1:21). Having God’s Word in our hearts and minds, and being committed to living according to its precepts is what will save us. This verse leads us to a most fundamental viewpoint: “I have a soul, and so I need to study the Book that is going to teach me how to take care of it!”

Fourth, studying the word “soul” motivates us to evangelism. If we believe that all men are given an eternal soul, and that soul will either find eternal rest in heaven or eternal torment in hell, then we will be motivated to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all. Paul said quite clearly that there will be “tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” (Rom. 2:9). No child of God wants to see anyone endure such a fate. Therefore we are strongly motivated to educate people on their most precious souls, and that those souls will find an eternal dwelling; either in eternal rest or eternal punishment. James said “let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (Jam. 5:20).

Fifth, studying the word “soul” motivates us to faithful living. The Hebrews writer noted that our hope is “an anchor for the soul” (Heb. 6:19). It is possible for our souls to drift away from God. Yet He is our hope of eternal reward. It is imperative that we keep our souls close to God. We know that Jesus gave up Himself in order to redeem us. He now operates as our Advocate before the throne of God. As a

result of His work, we can remain “sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19). We recognize that we are called to love God with “all of our soul” (Mat. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

Sixth, our souls are under constant attack. They are in continual warfare. Peter says that we need to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). In that text in Hebrews 6, we are reminded that the anchor of hope is under constant strain through various trials and temptations. Satan desires to blow us off course so that our souls will become shipwrecked on the rocks of unfaithfulness. He will use others who will “entice unstable souls” (2 Pet. 2:14). Yet our hope is in God’s promise and oath. He assured us that He will do what He promised if we will stay faithful to Him. Despite the continual attacks coming from Satan, our souls must remain with God. There they find mercy and forgiveness, kindness and compassion. Today, is our soul right where it needs to be, anchored in Jesus Christ?

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## A Study Of Death

*Eric L. Owens*



Eric Owens is married to Vanessa and they have three daughters. He is the pulpit minister at the Avondale church of Christ in Decatur, Georgia, and has been there since 1997. He was also appointed as an elder at Avondale in 2009. Eric graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1994. He has written books entitled *Do You Take God? Committing to God's Design for Marriage* and *So You Want To Be Happy*. Eric is a frequent speaker in gospel meetings, lectureships, and marriage seminars all over the country.

Public speaking is listed as Americans' number-one fear—before death at number five and loneliness weighing in at number seven. I guess that means that most of us are less afraid of dying alone than of making fools of ourselves in front of others.

While public speaking may be tough, to fear it more than death is a clear indication that we don't know what we ought to about death. When humans die, their time living on earth ends, and their time in eternal life begins and will have no end. Death is the door we enter that leads to eternal joy or eternal torment (Luke 16:19-31). Death is the gate through which we pass that leads us to the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Death is the river we cross that brings us to the shores of eternity, and we will either hear "well done, good and faithful servant," or "I never knew you: depart from me" (KJV, Mat. 25:21; Mat. 7:23). Death is the hallway that leads us to the courtroom of God, where we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and receive justice for what we have done in this body (2 Cor. 5:10).

When we die our opportunity to accept God's offer of

grace, Jesus' promise to wash us in His blood, and the Spirit and the bride's invitation to come ends. With the threat of eternal damnation looming for everyone who dies without Jesus, how can public speaking cause us more fear? Truly and sadly, man does not like to retain God in his knowledge.

It remains a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and God is still assuring us vengeance belongs to Him; He will recompense and the Lord will judge His people. If one has not obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because of death he should not eat or sleep; he should not tarry or linger; he should have no peace, joy, or comfort. He should use all of his resources to seek the Lord and find Him, for if death gets to him before he gets to Christ, the combined vocabulary of humanity cannot adequately describe his condition.

If death is our fifth-worst fear, we clearly don't know what it is, and I am thankful for this assignment. In order to understand death, let's first discuss life.

### **What Is Life?**

As we will see momentarily, every definition of death speaks of the cessation of life. Therefore, in order for us to understand and appreciate the significance and import of death, we must first discuss life. Of life, Merriam-Webster says, "the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body." With a few more details dictionary.com says, "the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death."

We know matter is not eternal, no new matter is being made, and that which is matter decreases in usefulness. Therefore, life must be eternal, and it is.

God is eternal life. John describes Jesus in the following fashion (note the emphasis on life):



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

John writes of the Word that in Him was life. Life originates with God. John also writes that he and the other apostles heard, saw, looked upon, and even handled the eternal life:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;). (1 John 1:1-2)

We know that when John spoke of the Word being made flesh that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was (and is) the origin of all life (John 1:14). God, through His loving kindness and graciousness, gave humanity life. Therefore, human life is sacred because humanity shares the image of God. Genesis one teaches us **that** God made us,

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping

thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

In chapter two of Genesis we learn **how** God made us, “And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Life comes from life and that of the same kind, so when God created man, He breathed into him and man became alive. God is spirit (John 4:24), and we are His offspring (Acts 17:29); therefore, we also are eternal spirit-beings housed inside of temporal fleshly bodies. A proper understanding of death must begin with an understanding of life, for life teaches us what death is.

### **Definitions of Death**

According to dictionary.com, the word death is defined as “the act of dying; the end of life; the total and permanent cessation of all the vital functions of an organism.” This, or something very near it, is the standard definition of death. There are, however, some additional thoughts when the medical community weighs in (but nothing that alters the definition, just which vital functions should be used to determine death). Is death the permanent cessation of all vital functions or only the pulmonary functions, or is death the loss of full brain activity? Standard definitions of death almost always exclude our eternal nature.

### **Scripture’s Definition Of Death**

Since God gave us life, God is the only one who can truly tell us what death is. God gives us His definition of human death. James, writing about faith, uses death as an example to teach the life-giving force of action to belief.

Works, or obedience, is to faith what the spirit is to the body: it is life:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way. **For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.** (Jam 2:20-26) [emphasis added, E.L.O.]

When a human being's spirit departs from his body, the result of that departure is death. Those who remain are left with a body without a soul, just like Adam before God breathed life into him in the garden. There are two ways of illustrating this: first, when a woman's spirit departed her body, and second, when the Lord brought someone's spirit back into her body.

The first example is when Rachael was giving birth to her second son Benjamin:

And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath:

and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. **And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died)** that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. (Gen. 35:16-19) [emphasis added, E.L.O.]

Note the expression, “as her soul was in departing, (for she died).” James’ words ring true—the body without the spirit is dead. After she died, Jacob did what we do: he took her body and buried it. The second example demonstrated our Lord’s power over life and death: the Lord was sought because a child was sick, but before He could arrive the child died. The Master was not to be troubled because the child was already dead. Jesus went to the home and the account follows:

And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the **father** and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. **And her spirit came again, and she arose** straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. (Luke 8:51-55) [emphasis added E.L.O.]

James' words are shown in reverse: if the body without the spirit is death, then the spirit brought back into the body is life. Unlike Jesus, no one can call someone's spirit back into them today.

### **Death's Introduction**

Any study of death must consider the origins of death, or rather death's introduction to humanity. The concept of our lives ending furnishes us with the arresting part of the study. Paul wrote: "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" (Rom. 5:12). Paul would also write that in Adam, all die. He does not mean that we inherit Adam's sin; no one can inherit sin (Eze. 18:4; Eze. 18:20). Jesus was born of a woman but He did not sin (Gal. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:22). While we don't inherit Adam's sin, we all inherit death as a result of Adam's sin.

God told Adam and Eve about death:

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Gen. 2:15-17)

There is much debate as to what kind of death, physical or spiritual, God meant when He spoke these words to Adam. Interestingly, that would not have been a debate for Adam and Eve: their understanding is evidenced by their fear and hiding from the presence of God. The word "die" in the verse

is defined by Brown, Driver, and Briggs as “to die, kill, have one executed.” Strong says “to *die* (literally or figuratively); causatively to *kill*.”

A few observations: First, there is nothing figurative in Genesis 2—the trees, the rivers, the people, the animals, and all of the language is literal. Second, the meaning of “die” or “death” is die or death; as the body without the spirit is dead, the result is death. Death does not mean separation—it can cause separation but it does not mean separation—it means death, to die, kill, have one executed. The word “die” is used twice in the verse. I heard one preacher say of the word “die” in the verse, “dying thou shalt die,” that it is a violent, physical death. Third, the other usages of death, and any figurative use, are revealed well after Genesis 2. Fourth, the figurative is never the primary definition. Paul addresses this point in discussing the opposite of death, the resurrection:

But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? *Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh *is* not the same flesh: but *there is* one *kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, *and* another of birds. *There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. *There is* one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and

another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. **There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.** And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit. **Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.** The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. (1 Cor. 15:35-49) [emphasis added]

God's definition of death in James is God's definition in the garden. As Paul discusses the resurrection, standing again, he moves seamlessly between life and death. The body is sown and raised. It dies and it rises again. Paul writes that there is a natural body and a spiritual body, and then compares and contrasts Adam and Christ then he makes this impactful statement. "Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46).

Adam would have known nothing of a concept of

spiritual death; because the spiritual is not first, he would have thought of his natural body. This is also supported by his reaction and conversation with God. Adam's own words were, "I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself." Afraid of what? Not of being put out of the garden; he couldn't have known of that punishment (we can't know God's mind before He reveals it to us). No, Adam was afraid of the only punishment he had heard: if you eat of the fruit of the tree, you will die.

A few other thoughts: when God created Adam and Eve, He provided them not simply life, but He put the tree of life in the garden. We need not wonder what its capabilities were, for God tells us, and it was one of the reasons God drove the man from the garden:

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 for ever: 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. 3:22-24)

The Godhead's concern was that Adam would eat of the tree and live forever. I've never heard anyone suggest that if Adam ate of the tree of life he would live forever spiritually. If he attempted to live forever by eating the fruit, what fate would he have been trying to avoid? Everyone has always understood what death meant, and it is precisely because we



understand that spiritual death has such significance. It is also humanity's understanding of death that has caused him to fear it (Heb. 2:15). When we leave the scene in the garden, humanity's existence is forever altered, our reality is vastly different, for now we know death!

### **Concepts Of Death**

The revelation of God unfolds gradually, and as it does, we are given more information about ideas and concepts. None of the new information we receive ever invalidates truths already known. They expand on them, but they don't contradict them. This is true of death, but also of other topics. God speaks of being married to His people and being jealous of their affection. This makes great sense because we first know the intimacy, unity, and commitment of marriage. In this same vein, God speaks of Israel being unfaithful, even committing adultery (see Ezekiel 16 and Hosea 1-4). The early chapters of Hosea resonate with any spouse, because we know how harmful unfaithfulness is to a marriage.

It is this thought that also shapes our understanding of death. Paul speaks of those who were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Of some Paul wrote, "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). These powerful thoughts explode into our understanding because of the power and force of the word death. However, the force is felt precisely because we already well understand the meanings of die, death, and dead. Paul's audience also understood their meanings in the same way.

Whatever the concept of "dead in sins" and "dead while she lives" means, it should not be interpreted to mean a person is "spiritually dead." As we will notice, when one dies spiritually he has no hope of returning, no hope of escape. Those who are dead in sins are alive and have opportunity to

repent. The father said of his son, “my son was dead and is alive” (Luke 15:24). The people of which John writes will have no such hope. When John writes the revelation, he is writing the last book of the Bible. John cannot write anything that would contradict or invalidate known truths in the first 65 books, with all of the available information from God on the subject of death revealed, before he wrote. John only wrote of two deaths:

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. 2:11)

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. 20:6)

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:14)

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Rev. 21:8)

From John’s writing, we cannot read the Bible and have three deaths, two of which are spiritual death. The first resurrection

occurs when one, predicated upon his hearing the Gospel and believing the Good News, repents and confesses Christ; the candidate then surrenders to being immersed in water for the forgiveness of his sins. The old man of sin is put to death, buried, and this new man rises to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Though he has participated in the first resurrection, he is still mortal and must not allow sin to reign any more in his mortal body (Rom. 6:11-12). The first death for this man is when his spirit departs his body as James wrote.

According to John, those who had a part in the first resurrection will not be harmed by the second death. John tells us what the second death is: it is the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, or eternal damnation; John states that **this** is the second death. There may be nuances that are hard to understand, but this is not. There are two deaths; the first is of the spirit departing the body, the second is the spirit eternally condemned in the lake of fire. All men must surrender obedience to the Gospel. The first death is not the worst death.

### **Death Personified**

Let us now discuss death as if he were an entity: consider if death had life. As far as manners are concerned, death has none; he is the rudest individual humanity has ever known. There is no easy way to say it: death hurts us and he haunts us.

### ***Death Is Inconvenient***

Death is an uninvited, unwelcomed, and unwanted guest. He never comes at a convenient time, for there is no convenient time for him to come. No family is ever “ready,” everyone desires a little more time, and no one ever enjoys the arrival or presence of death.

### ***Death Is Rude And Offers No Compassion***

Death shows up, pushes his way into our lives without invitation, and comes despite our desires. He shows no concern for our bargains and offers no comfort to our pain. He is relentless and unyielding. He forces his way into our lives, disrupts them, and departs as quickly as he came.

### ***Death's Effects Are Persistent***

After bursting into our lives uninvited he leaves, and leaves us to deal with the pain he has caused. Like a tsunami or tornado, he destroys what is in his path, and, after the fear, panic, and damage, he leaves us to deal with the aftermath and pick up the pieces. The hurt continues long after the loss; there are no apologies, nothing but pain, anguish, and grieving that gives way to mourning and a numbing pain that has no remedy and may last a lifetime.

### ***Death Is Indiscriminate***

In a world where everyone seeks advantage, there are no advantages when death comes. Death has no favorites or exceptions. If ever humanity is the same it is when death comes; death takes males and females. Death can't be bought; he takes the rich and famous as well as the poor and unknown. He takes from every ethnicity; every culture has to deal with its dead. Death takes the young and old; some parents don't leave the hospital with their babies, and we can only imagine the pain when death comes. Death is selfish and self-centered...in fact, all death does is take!

### **Death As A Warrior**

If death were considered as an enemy approaching the shores of humanity, we would have but one solution—surrender. We would know of his coming but would not know when, and we would know there would be nothing we could do to stop him. And so death has occupied the minds of man since his introduction into our existence. We know of his

power and prowess, we know of those he has left in his wake, and we know one day he is coming for us.

***Death's Past Success Is Impressive***

As humans, we have our legends, we have our myths, and we have our greatness. We have mighty men and women who have conquered. We have and continue to erect monuments and statues to demonstrate and commemorate our greatness. But we also are forced to deal with an indisputable fact: death has conquered them all. History teaches us one loud and persistent lesson: death is the undefeated conqueror of humanity.

No matter how long we live (one man almost lived to be a thousand years old), no matter how much a man has conquered (Alexander the son of Philip was called “the Great” and is said to have conquered the world), no matter how much a man has learned (Imhotep, Euclid, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others), no matter how mighty a man is (David and all of his mighty men, Samson, and others of great strength), no matter how much wealth a man has amassed (Solomon, Steve Jobs, Michael Jackson).

Every culture, every ethnicity, both genders, young and old, rich and poor, tall and short, beautiful and not so, big and small, bald and those with hair like Absalom, bold and shy, daring and fearful, famous and infamous. All of our heroes, all of our mighty men, all of our conquerors, everyone in which we placed any hope—death has defeated them all!

***Death Consumed And Spoiled Solomon's Search***

The wisest, richest, and most powerful man to ever live wanted to answer the question of life and understand its meaning. So he went on a search to find meaning and fulfillment under the sun. While hardly the first, he was arguably the most qualified to undertake such a search and, if possible, find the answer for humanity. The record of the

search is found in the book of Ecclesiastes, but there was only one problem.

The wise, rich, and powerful king kept running into death; it seemed death was at the end of everything Solomon found, eventually leading him to the conclusion, “vanity of vanities saith the preacher, **all is vanity**” (Ecc. 1:2). At times, his reflections on death seem like a concession speech. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted” (Ecc 3:1-2).

Eventually, Solomon acknowledged death’s power and sway and realized that, even his divinely given wisdom, his enormous estate, his massive treasure, and his absolute power, were nothing when death called. Solomon knew everyone must stop what he is doing and answer death’s call. “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it” (Ecc 8:8). Solomon was right, and history had told him the same; his search had confirmed the past and his present was loudly proclaiming the accuracy of his observation. There is nothing you can do to stop death.

### ***Death Is Feared***

What else could we feel when faced with an unstoppable force of destruction that is impervious to our power, unmoved by our pleas, without feeling for our pain, and bent on ending our lives? What else could we feel but fear? The words of the Hebrews writer encompass far more than the feelings of the Hebrews in the Old Testament; whether meant or not, fearing death has been the reality of humanity since Adam and Eve sinned. The door was opened, and when sin came into the world, death came with it (“who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to

bondage”) (Heb. 2:15).

Death was like a tyrant destroying a nation; someone needed to stand up. Death was like an outlaw menacing humanity’s town; a sheriff was needed. Death had no rival and humanity had no answer. Helpless and hopeless humanity cried out to God. Somebody needed to do something about death; death needed to be defeated! But who; but how?

### **Death’s Defeat**

Solomon had well summed up humanity’s interaction with death; no man has power to retain the spirit in the day of death. Death had to be the most proud warrior humanity had ever known and history had ever recorded. He was undefeated—even those who were occasionally raised died.

#### ***Christ Came To Earth***

The Word was made flesh and He would tabernacle among us (John 1:14). The Divine nature would take on flesh, be born of a woman, and His name would be Emmanuel, “which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mat. 1:23). Hebrews 10:5 records that a body was prepared for Christ. When Solomon said no man can retain the spirit in the day of death, he didn’t know Jesus. Our Lord was not just a man; He was the God man.

#### ***Christ’s Birth Brought Peace On Earth***

Heaven and earth were aware of the birth of Christ and rejoiced. The shepherds keeping watch over their sheep were alerted, and they were afraid because the ones who announced the birth of Jesus to them were angels. A multitude of the heavenly host were praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men” (Luke. 2:14). Men had known fear, but now they would know peace. If the angels in heaven knew of Christ’s birth, and if humanity knew of Christ and could rejoice and have peace and good will, surely death must have

known of Christ's birth.

***Christ Was Not Afraid Of Death***

“Never man spake like this man” is not just a reference to Christ's divine teaching (John 7:46). No one before Christ had ever spoken about death the way Jesus did. Christ was not simply unafraid of death, He spoke as if He was more powerful than death. Concerning death, Jesus said:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17-18)

Death had heard men boast of their power and might, he had heard men speak of their abilities and achievements. But his record stood, it was unblemished. In the end, they all succumbed. Now he was hearing, for the first time, someone saying that no one could take His life (no one could kill him), and He didn't have to die. He had power to lay down His life and He had power to take His life again; no man had ever spoken like this. For death, the words were blasphemous—the nerve, the audacity. The challenge had been joined and death accepted.

***The Day Jesus Died***

The crowds Jesus attracted must have infuriated death. The chants the people made of His Messiahship must have upset death. As the week of our Savior's passion progressed, death must have taken particular delight. One of the Lord's apostles betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies. The Pharisees had at last arrested Him and gotten Him under their control. The trials our Lord endured were not worthy of the



name trial.

Another friend denied knowing Him and the rest of His close followers abandoned Him. The Romans beat Him, mocked Him, and condemned Him. Bloodied, beaten, and weak, He bore His own instrument of death. He was nailed to the cross, hoisted into the air, suspended between heaven and earth, and He suffered. He spoke to those assembled, He instructed an apostle, He cried out to His Father, and then with death nearby, and having seen this or a similar scene too many times to count, death watched in anticipation as Christ breathed His last breath and then gave up the ghost.

Death must have rejoiced like he had never rejoiced before. From Adam to Calvary, no death could ever have been sweeter. If ever death felt challenged, now it was certain: in death's conception, not even the God man could resist his power.

### ***Death Defeated***

It is the greatest irony in human history, one that neither death nor the devil could have foreseen. God was born of a woman, took on flesh so that He could die, and by His death defeated death. It was God's plan all along.

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. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and

faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. (Heb. 2:14-18)

It is difficult to imagine what death must have thought. The Messiah of humanity had died. Day one of the death of our Lord, maybe death rejoiced. Day two of the Christ in the grave, maybe death gloated. But can you imagine the stir in hades when early Sunday morning on the third day, the One who said “no man taketh it [my life] from me,” the One who said, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again,” made good on His promise (John 10:18).

Maybe death tried to prevent Him, but according to Acts 2:24, “it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” When the King arose from the dead, death knew his reign of terror was over. He was never all powerful; that distinction belongs to our God. He was never worthy of fear like he thought; the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). His hold on those before Christ was gone, and those who would follow Christ need never fear again. Indeed, Christ’s birth brought peace on earth and good will toward man, and Christ’s resurrection brought victory and triumph over death.

### **Christ’s Resurrection**

Christ’s resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. The Gospel, or Good News, is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4). A careful reading of 1 Corinthians 15 explains the implications of His resurrection: it teaches forcefully that if there is no

resurrection, then we are of all men most miserable.

Paul asserts that if the dead rise not, let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. If there is no resurrection, then we are yet in our sins, we are hopeless, and death still reigns. But there *is* a resurrection to overcome all of the pain, misery, and agony that death has inflicted on mankind. Because of Jesus and because of His resurrection, death has been defeated at last. So we don't fear death anymore, even when death takes our loved ones, because of Christ. We still sorrow, but not as others who have no hope (1 The. 4:13-18). Instead, we comfort one another with the power of Christ's resurrection and the certainty of His coming for us in the clouds one day. Christ became one of us so that He could defeat death for all of us.

### Conclusion

A study of death doesn't seem complete to stop at death because of Christ; Paul's words seem a fitting end:

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? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that

your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1  
Cor. 15:53-58)

The good news is that Christ rose and death is defeated; thank God for Jesus.

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# The Parable Of The Tares

*Tony DeBerry*



Tony DeBerry has been married to the former Terri Wilks for twenty-two years, and together they have five children: Zoe, Tony Jr., Theodore, Lorraine, and Laila. He is a 2012 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching. Tony is the assistant minister and serves as one of the elders of Coleman Avenue church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee. He has worked in the church all his life and is the son of a minister; his two older brothers also serve as ministers and elders.

## Introduction

Jesus, the Master Teacher, had the ability to confound the elite and communicate with the common man through parables. The Greek word used for parable is *parabole*, which means “to cast beside.” When he used agricultural examples, we realize that the everyday farmer understood exactly what he was saying. When dealing with subject matters as important as the kingdom of heaven, the parable of the wheat and the tare paints a perfect picture of the two types of seeds that were diametrically opposed to one another, yet sown in the same field.

When the Bible said “seeing see not; and hearing they hear not” (KJV, Mat. 13:13; Deu. 29:3-4; Isa. 44:18), it is referring to the listener. For example, how God hardened Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 4:21 by the information that Pharaoh received and did not want to hear. Many of the elite did not want to hear anything from Jesus, because they despised Him. Those of high academic pursuit in the religious world would frown upon the language of a common man when dealing with the kingdom of heaven.

There were two types of listeners listening to Jesus;

those who wanted to hear with open minds and open hearts (Mat. 13:9), and those who turned their noses up to His teachings. The latter type of listeners can be broken down into several categories: selective listeners who filtered out the message to reinforce their biased standings for the future, insulated listeners who avoided or ignored the message, defensive listeners who took innocent comments as personal attacks, and ambushing listeners who listened carefully to collect information that could be used against another. Can you imagine someone who had the privilege to sit and listen to Jesus with any other purpose than to be saved? “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).

### **Let’s Examine The Parable**

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. (Mat. 13:24)

Growing up in the city, I had no idea how hard it was to cultivate the ground before seeds could be planted. This gives me a greater appreciation for what God has done for us from the beginning of time (Isa. 62:10; Luke 1:16-17; Luke 3:4; Eph.1:4). Once the farmer has cultivated the ground and gathered his seeds to sow, he examines the seeds to make sure they are good. And when good seeds are planted, in all likelihood they should produce good crops. After a hard day’s work of sowing in his fields, he feels with all certainty that he has done an honorable day’s work to provide for his family.

We can use as an example Paul’s admonishment to the church: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for

those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim 5:8).

Why are we amazed when, in spite of our best efforts, there will be people who will refuse to obey God’s Word and hate His people? These are the choices they have made in spite of God making every effort to save them.

### **The Enemy**

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. (Mat. 13:25)

The body requires sleep. There is only so much work you can do before you rest. I’ve heard it preached throughout the years that somehow the farmer and his hands were negligent by simply resting. Jesus gives no indication that this man was lazy or irresponsible. But He speaks of the heart of the second sower. He called him an enemy. The Greek word used here is *exthrós*: properly, an enemy; someone openly hostile, animated by deep-seated hatred. The word implies irreconcilable hostility proceeding out of a “personal” hatred bent on inflicting harm.

What does the enemy sow? He sows bad seeds. In this case, Jesus names it tare. The Greek word for tare used here is “*zizanian*” which is darnel. A darnel is a poisonous ryegrass. The poison of the darnel ryegrass was known as a soporific, or a hypnotic type poison, one that would induce sleep. Not only was it poisonous, but it would only allow the healthiest of the wheat to survive.

Tare also does not require any attention. For this reason, the second sower was able to sow his seeds and leave. He knew it would spread because it was an invasive species with the root system traveling far before the plant sprung up.

Why would the enemy want to plant a poisonous plant among the wheat that the farmer was planting? He did it to destroy as many as he could.

### **Bringing Forth The Fruit**

But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. (Mat. 13:26)

Jesus has said unto His disciples in Mark 16:15-16, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Sometimes we forget that we are commanded to go and preach the Gospel, despite the oppositions we may face. The enemy attempted to destroy both the wheat and the field. The wheat undoubtedly had to work harder to survive in order to overcome the tares that were rapidly growing and to produce fruit. We realize that no matter what we go through, God is always with us when we are doing His will. “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (1 Pet 3:12). When great multitudes were listening to Jesus and believed his teachings, there were also people who condemned and criticized Him to discourage His believers.

### **The Good Seed And The Bad Seed**

So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? (Mat. 13:27)



The tares have been called counterfeit because they resemble wheat, but ultimately produce no value. In their infant stage the tare and the wheat look alike; however as the plant matures, the differences are clearly visible. Can you imagine the farmer looking over his field, not knowing what the enemy had done and anticipating a great harvest, only to find out that there had been tares planted among the wheat? This should have been a time of great joy, to see the fruits of his labor. Instead, there is a realization that he has been sabotaged by an enemy.

We should realize that the servants identified the tares while they were going out to work in the field. They did not use their own judgement on how to deal with the tares, but sought guidance from the owner of the field. We must keep in mind that we do not own the field nor the crop, but are servants to help with the harvest (1 Cor. 3:5-9, 16:10). Satan always seeks to infiltrate the good people of God to destroy and discourage them (Job 1:6-7).

### **Saving The Wheat**

He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. (Mat. 13:28-29)

When the master of the field surveyed his crops, he knew exactly what had happened. He said, without hesitation, that an enemy had done it. To sow seeds in another man's field and to attempt to destroy his crop was a sign of disrespect and deep hatred. Not only would it destroy his business or his ability to trade, it could also starve his family.

The master, likewise, understood that while prematurely gathering up the tares, he would also destroy some of the wheat because the root system had become entangled. Remember, this is the strongest of the wheat that has survived the enemy's initial attack. It would be wrong for the servants to come and destroy the good with the bad. The tares are knowledgeable of the mission of the wheat but refuse to do what is right (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

Yet again, the servants' respect for the master caused them to seek his will before theirs. Let us remember that the work of the Lord can never be compromised by our personal agendas. Although we can identify the tare, we still must follow the commands of the master.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom. 16:17)

### **Until The Harvest**

Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. (Mat. 13:30)

Growing together does not mean fellowshiping together:

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)

We are to hold onto God's unchanging hand until the harvest time (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10). At the time of the harvest, the tares will not be able to disguise themselves. When the crops hit maturity, the seeds of the wheat cause it to bow over while the tares continue to stand straight. So when the master sends out the reapers, they can clearly distinguish between the two. The two clearly have different destinations because one was a productive crop and served mankind. We also must be productive and heed to what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

The other was an unproductive crop, only used for destruction:

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)

The master clearly states that the reapers will deal with the tares first. Their destination is that of torture, where there is no escape, no comfort and no light. "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). But for the wheat, he will gather into his barn, a place of comfort, love, and light.

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. (John 14:1-3)

### **Conclusion**

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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

We realize in this parable that Jesus is speaking of Himself as the first sower, the field as the world, the good seed as the children of the kingdom, the enemy as Satan, the tares as the children of the wicked one, the harvest as the judgment day, the reapers as the angels, the barn as heaven and the fire as hell. This is one of two parables that Jesus interpreted. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

It is a wonderful blessing to have the Word of God.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1: 3-4).

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## What About The Rapture?

*John Baker*



pulpit minister.

John Baker is married to Angie, and together they have two children: Daniel and Abby. John has been preaching full time for more than sixteen years. He has been involved in local work in Texas and Louisiana, as well as work in Tanzania. For the past three years, John has been preaching at the Katy congregation in Katy, Texas, serving as their

Most New Testament Christians know very little about the premillennial doctrine of the rapture because neither the word nor the concept is found in Scripture. The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word *rapturo* which corresponds to the English words “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (NKJV). The most popular theory about the rapture holds that it will be a sudden, secret return of Jesus for His saints, both living and dead. According to this view, all who are not raptured will be left behind to endure the so-called “great tribulation” for a period of seven years. Premillennialists who teach the doctrine of the rapture ordinarily base their theory on three primary passages: John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. All of these passages refer to the second coming of Jesus, one of the most fundamental and thrilling doctrines of Scripture. However, many premillennialists attempt to use these passages to make a distinction between the coming of Christ for the church (the rapture) and the second coming of Christ to establish a literal kingdom on earth (Walvoord 267-269).

A study of the rapture doctrine is challenging because premillennialism is not monolithic; premillennial writers and

teachers are remarkably diverse in their views and opinions. Broadly speaking, there are two distinct forms of premillennialism: historic or classic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism (Grudem 1111-1112). The latter form is by far the most popular today and is distinguished by two foundational principles. First, dispensational premillennialists seek to apply a “literal hermeneutic” to all prophetic passages (although they struggle to be consistent in doing this). Second, dispensational premillennialists maintain a pronounced distinction between national Israel and the church. Dispensational premillennialists argue that the term “Israel” always refers to the physical posterity of Abraham, never the New Testament church (Enns 412). Thus, they claim that all the Abrahamic promises of Genesis 12 still apply to the nation of Israel today. Further, dispensational premillennialism denies that the church was ever prophesied in the Old Testament; rather, the church is understood to be something of a temporary or stop-gap measure until Christ can return and establish His literal, millennial kingdom in Israel (Enns 412). The influence of dispensational premillennialism has been greatly aided by publications such as the popular Scofield Reference Bible and more recently a number of well-known books and movies such as the *Left Behind* series by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye.

Even among dispensational premillennialists several different views of the rapture have been proposed. A few teach a post-tribulation rapture that coincides with the second coming (Erickson 386). Others believe in a mid-tribulation rapture of the church after the world has first endured 3½ years of Satan’s wrath. Some even believe in a partial rapture that involves only those in the church who are actively watching for and eagerly anticipating the return of Jesus. Still



others (without question the majority of premillennialists today) believe in a pre-tribulation rapture that they believe will signal the beginning of the “great tribulation” for the world that is left behind (Enns 413-414). The wide diversity of views regarding premillennialism in general and the rapture in particular makes a basic study of the rapture especially challenging. Due to its current popularity and widespread acceptance in the religious world, this particular study will focus upon the pre-tribulation view of the rapture.

How should New Testament Christians respond to friends and neighbors who believe in the doctrine of the rapture? One of the most helpful ways to deal with erroneous ideas is simply to affirm the truth. When the doctrine of God’s Word is made plain and obvious, it exposes the fallacies of false systems of belief (Psa. 119:105; Eph. 5:11). Notice carefully what the Bible teaches regarding the fate of the New Testament church at the end of time.

### **Scripture Proclaims Just One “Second Coming of Christ”**

Observe several critical details regarding the return of Jesus Christ. First, His bodily appearance at the end of time will be a **second coming**. Hebrews 9:28 states, “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” The Hebrews author uses the word “second” (*deuteros* in Greek) to indicate sequence. Jesus has already appeared once in this world to make atonement for sin (Heb. 9:26). The second appearance of Jesus will be just that: a second coming (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11). By comparison, premillennialists claim that Jesus will return once to rapture the saints and then His “second coming” will actually take place at the end of seven years of tribulation. Erickson writes, “Pretribulationism, then, maintains that there will be two phases to Christ’s coming, or one could even say two

comings” (401). Simply put, premillennialism has a difficult mathematical challenge: the pretribulation doctrine of the rapture has the Lord returning too many times.

Next, the return of Jesus will be **visible**. Revelation 1:7 declares, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.” Notice carefully that even the wicked will see Jesus when He returns; premillennialism teaches that the rapture will leave behind wicked, bewildered people who have little or no idea what has transpired. However, just as the flood in Noah’s day was a visible worldwide phenomenon, so the second coming of Jesus and its associated events will be visible to the entire world (2 Pet. 3:5-7). At His ascension, angels declared that He would return in the same visible manner that His disciples had seen Him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

The second coming of Jesus will also be **audible**. Jesus stated that all who are in the graves will, “Hear His voice” (John 5:28). Two additional passages describe the heavens passing away “with a great noise,” and teach that the Lord’s return will be accompanied by a shout and a trumpet (2 Pet. 3:10; 1 The. 4:16). Scripture affirms that the return of Jesus will be extremely noisy. Commenting on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, George Ladd appropriately wrote, “It is very difficult to find a secret coming of Christ in these verses” (63).

When Jesus comes again, His coming will be **final**, for it will mark the end of the world and also the end of opportunity for salvation. In 2 Peter 3:10-13 the apostle prophesies the destruction of the heavens and the earth using very explicit terminology: they “pass away,” they “melt,” they “will be burned up,” and they “will be dissolved.” Premillennialists hold that the Lord will return to establish a

literal kingdom on earth for a thousand years, but such is impossible to do if the earth has already been destroyed. In addition, 2 Peter 3:15a warns people to “consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.” At the second coming of Jesus, His patience will be at an end and salvation will no longer be a possibility (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9).

Especially worthy of note is the fact that Peter declares that his teaching on the second coming of Jesus is consistent with Paul’s teaching on the subject: “As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you” (2 Pet. 3:15b). Here, Scripture gives an interpretive help: whatever else a person may discern from Pauline passages like 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, the events and circumstances associated with the Lord’s return as described in 2 Peter 3 must be kept in view. Scripture proclaims only one second coming of Christ.

### **Scripture Proclaims Just One Resurrection Of The Dead**

The Bible repeatedly indicates that the return of Jesus will immediately precede the resurrection of every dead human being who has ever lived. Dispensational premillennialism argues the following:

There will...be three resurrections. The first will be the resurrection of the righteous dead at the rapture, for Paul teaches that believers who are alive at the time will not precede those who are dead. Then at the end of the tribulation there will be a resurrection of those saints who have died during the tribulation. Finally, at the end of the millennium, there will be a resurrection of unbelievers. (Erickson 401)

In contrast, notice the characteristics of the resurrection of the dead. First, it will **correspond to the last day**. Jesus says, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). Later Paul indicated that the world would know the end has come because death will be the last enemy defeated (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20). When the rest of the dead are raised, then death will have been destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Mark it: the resurrection of the dead will coincide with the final day of this world’s history. The rapture doctrine is false because it teaches a resurrection of believers more than a thousand years in advance of the resurrection of unbelievers.

Notice also that the resurrection of the dead will be **universal in scope**. Several New Testament passages focus specifically on the resurrection of believers, a fact which has led some to conclude that there must be a separate resurrection (cf. John 6:54; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 The. 4:13-17; Phi. 3:10; Phi. 3:20-21). However, when one considers all the evidence it becomes clear that the resurrection of the dead will include both believers and unbelievers. Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Notice that the Lord indicates that both the good and evil will be raised at a certain “hour.” He does not conceive of the resurrection as two or three separate events. Further, Paul proclaimed, “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15). Paul’s understanding of the universal nature of the resurrection is

evidenced by his use of the singular “**a** resurrection,” and the inclusion of the “unjust” in his statement. 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 also teaches that at His coming Jesus will execute vengeance on His enemies and bring comfort to the righteous. Given the previously established fact that His second coming will signal the end of the world, one must conclude that a universal resurrection is essential to the fulfillment of this promise.

### **Scripture Proclaims Just One Hope For All Humanity**

Ephesians 4:4 affirms that only one hope is available to the world today: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” Elsewhere Jesus stated, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). To the unbelieving Jewish leaders the apostles preached: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The New Testament emphatically proclaims that the only hope for humanity is found in Christ and His church. In addition, all New Testament believers (both Jew and Gentile alike) hoped for heaven, not some millennial kingdom on earth (2 Cor. 5:1; Heb. 6:18-20; Phi. 3:20-21).

Dispensational premillennialists preach a doctrine that involves several hopes. Certainly they argue that many will be saved in the church. However, premillennialists additionally teach that during the great tribulation that follows the rapture, the nation of Israel will eventually accept Jesus as the Messiah. Not only that, but many Gentiles will also choose to believe in Jesus during this seven year tribulation. Walvoord writes that, at the end of the tribulation, “Gentiles who have put their faith in Christ are ushered into the blessings of the millennial kingdom and all others are put to death” (280). Thus, premillennialism affirms one hope for the church,

another for the nation of Israel, and yet another for the Gentiles left behind after the rapture of the saints.

Such a view contradicts several plain doctrines in Scripture. First, it contradicts the Lord's timing and promise in the Great Commission. Jesus said that the Gospel is to be preached "to the end of the age" (Mat. 28:20). Such is impossible for the church to do if all believers are to leave the planet seven years before the second coming of Christ. Second, the premillennial view contradicts God's plan to convince, convict, and convert man through the preaching of truth. Scripture is powerful, soul-saving, and effective to equip believers for every good work (Rom. 1:16; Jas. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:17). Premillennial doctrine indicates that many will be saved without the church and without the Gospel of Christ during the tribulation. Third, the premillennial view contradicts 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. When the Lord returns, His purpose will be to punish those who reject Him, not give them yet another chance to obey His will. Fourth, premillennial dogma contradicts the teaching of Scripture regarding the nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus said that the kingdom would arrive in the lifetime of some of his hearers two thousand years ago (Mark 9:1). Peter preached Jesus as the reigning King on Pentecost (Acts 2:33-36; Acts 17:7). The apostles taught Christians that they were part of the kingdom (Col. 1:13). John called himself a "fellow partaker" in the kingdom of God (ASV, Rev. 1:9). The world has only one hope precisely because the kingdom of God in Christ is a present reality. No distinction is made between the terms, "kingdom of God," and "kingdom of heaven" as is sometimes alleged (Mat. 3:1-3; Mark 1:15; Mat. 19:23-24). Dispensational premillennialism suggests that mankind has multiple opportunities for salvation apart from the Gospel and the church. Such a view is unquestionably a different Gospel

from that which the apostles preached (Gal. 1:6-8). Johnny Ramsey powerfully writes:

The very idea of something more important or precious than the shed blood of Christ and the pristine beauty of the church of the Lord borders on blasphemy of the deepest kind. Anyone who would even suggest that the appeal of Truth – through the Scriptures – *now*, cannot reach the lost like a period invented by sectarian dogma is abject sacrilege! (190)

### **Scripture Proclaims Just One Final Judgment**

Dispensational premillennialism teaches that God's ultimate judgments will be three in number. First, the church will be immediately judged by Jesus after the rapture (Enns 418). Premillennialists believe that passages like 2 Corinthians 5:10 refer exclusively to this judgment of the church upon their arrival in heaven immediately after the rapture. Second, both Israel and the Gentiles who are left behind after the rapture will be judged at the second coming seven years later. A number of premillennialists believe and teach that the "sheep and goats" judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 refers to this post-tribulation judgment. Third, premillennialism teaches that, according to Revelation 20:9-15, Jesus will raise all the wicked dead and judge them along with Satan and his angels at the great white throne judgment at the close of the thousand-year reign (Walvoord 287). Thus, dispensational premillennialism holds that three separate judgments will occur.

God's Word consistently teaches just one final judgment for the entire world. First, Jesus taught that there would be no separation of good and evil until the end of the

world (Mat. 13:37-42; Mat. 13:47-50). The rapture doctrine has the good being separated out of the world and judged seven years prior to the second coming. Second, Paul wrote that he eagerly anticipated receiving a crown of righteousness from Jesus Himself “on that day” (2 Tim. 4:8). The context of 2 Timothy 4 clearly indicates that “that day” corresponds to the same day when Christ appears to judge the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Elsewhere in his writings Paul indicated that the judgment would involve both the righteous and the wicked (2 The. 1:7-10; 2 Cor. 5:10). The inspired apostle did not conceive of two or more separate “days” on which the world would face God’s final judgment. Third, a straightforward reading of 1 Corinthians 15:23-26 will demonstrate that Christ will deal with both the righteous and the wicked at His coming, for He will put an end to all rule and all authority and power at that time. Scripture promises that God will deal with all men, both good and evil, on one great day (John 12:48).

Standing before Greek philosophers at the Aeropagus, Paul stated that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Notice carefully that the judgment is an **appointment** (singular) set by God Himself. Additionally, the judgment is **universal**, as it pertains to the entire world. Further, God’s judgment will be **impartial** because it will be conducted in righteousness by the One whom God has ordained: Jesus Christ the Righteous. Finally, notice that the day of judgment is **inevitable** because it has been promised by God and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

### Conclusion

In this author’s view, the most egregious error of



dispensational premillennialism is its teaching regarding the nature and purpose of the church of Jesus Christ. If premillennialists would accept and appreciate Bible teaching regarding the place of the church in the eternal purpose of God, perhaps they would more quickly and readily accept the falsehood of the doctrine of the rapture. The inspired words of Paul stand in stark contrast to the teachings of dispensational premillennialism: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6). May more people come to see the preciousness of the church of Jesus Christ, and may all find themselves prepared and watching for the Lord’s return.

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## The Thief On The Cross

*Ronnie Scherffius*



Ronnie Scherffius has been married to Athena for twenty-three years, and together they have seven children. He is a 2002 graduate of the Memphis School of Preaching, where he also served as the president of his class. He has done local work in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Texas. Presently, he serves as the minister for the Victoria congregation in Victoria, Texas. In addition to local work, he has done mission work in Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Of the traditions and doctrines of men, few have brought to ruin so many as the false doctrine of “salvation by faith only.” True to form, Satan has clouded the simple truth by prejudicing the hearts and minds of men through perversion: obedience to the Gospel has become “works salvation,” baptism is demeaned as “water salvation,” saving faith has been perverted to “accept Jesus into your heart,” and the saving grace of God has been corrupted into “salvation by grace through faith apart from works,” **the holy grail of Protestant denominationalism**. With the insertion of one simple word, Satan has changed the truth of God into a lie and deceived the masses into believing that man is **not** responsible to obey the Gospel of Christ; that man is **not** capable, of his own volition, to heed the Gospel call; that man does **not** have a free will to choose; that baptism is **not** a part of God’s plan of salvation.

### **There Is Something Man Must Do**

The Bible is clear regarding man’s responsibility and required action to the soul-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ! Jesus declared, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,

shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth** the will of my Father which is in heaven” (KJV, Mat. 7:21). The immediate response to the first Gospel sermon was, “Men and brethren, what shall we **do?**” (Acts 2:37). After hearing Cornelius’ account of events, Peter began, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, **and worketh righteousness**, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). Paul recounted that the Romans had “**obeyed** from the heart” the pattern of doctrine delivered to them (Rom. 6:17), i.e., the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). James admonished the saints to be “**doers** of the word, and not hearers only” (Jam. 1:22), an admonition John phrased as “**walking** in the light” (1 John 1:5-7). Beyond reasonable doubt the Bible clearly affirms there is something man must do regarding his salvation from sin.

### ***The Necessity Of Baptism***

Equally certain is the necessity of man to be baptized (immersed in water) in order to receive the remission of sins. Jesus clearly instructed, “He that **believeth and is baptized** shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). In response to those pricked by the Gospel at Pentecost the apostles commanded, “**Repent, and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Account after inspired account it is clearly demonstrated the necessity of baptism for one’s salvation (Acts 2:41; Acts 8:12-13; Acts 8:36; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:5; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 1:12-13; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; et al.).

### ***Transgressing The Word Of God***

In response to the scribes and Pharisees fallacious charge of sin against His disciples for failure to wash their hands before eating, Jesus replied, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Mat. 15:3).

Comparing the Word of God to Protestant precepts we discover how completely corrupt God's simple plan of salvation becomes when truth is tempered by the traditions of men. Wesleyan Methodism teaches that, "faith is the only response essential for salvation" (Methodist Discipline 53). Calvinist Presbyterianism frees man of his role in salvation and places all responsibility on the Holy Spirit: "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are **enabled to believe** to the king of their souls, is **the work of the Spirit** of Christ in their hearts" (Confession of Faith 54-55). Baptist doctrine does not fall far from the Protestant tree: "We believe the Scriptures teach that the salvation of sinners is wholly of grace" (Baptist Manual 61). Article six of the Baptist creed reads:

Justification includes the pardon of sin, and the gift of eternal life on principles of righteousness; that it is bestowed, not in consideration of any works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through faith in Christ; by means of which faith his perfect righteousness is freely imputed to us by God. (62)

Jeremiah professed, "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). The Jews of Paul's day, following the path of their fathers, sought to direct their steps in the way of righteousness, an error which the apostle condemned: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about **to establish their own righteousness**, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). How empty and powerless are the words of man when seeking the way to salvation apart from God's revealed will! How true the words of the wise man: "There is a way that seemeth right

unto a man, but **the end thereof are the ways of death**" (Pro. 16:25).

### The Thief On The Cross

#### *Dishonor Among Thieves*

A favorite "watering hole" of Protestants seeking support for their doctrine of salvation by faith only is the thief on the cross. The general premise is that since the thief on the cross was not baptized then baptism is not required of man today. Teaching that remission of sins comes through faith without baptism is little more than theft of the truth from innocent minds! By perverting the account of the thief on the cross, the false teacher himself becomes a thief and dishonors the beautiful work God has committed to man—preaching the Gospel of peace!

Consider the following as examples of how the account of the thief on the cross is used to deny the necessity of baptism and teach the error of salvation by faith only. From the website [www.truthaboutdeath.com](http://www.truthaboutdeath.com), Adventist Doug Batchelor teaches:

The repentance of the thief on the cross is a powerful story indeed. It shows us that conversions can happen at the end of one's life; that even the vilest criminals will be accepted by God if they come to Him; **that no more than a request for salvation made in faith is required by God.**

Note the following quotations from a sermon delivered by Dwight L. Moody, the well-known nineteenth-century preacher, connected with the Holiness Movement and founder of the Moody Church:

**You see, in the conversion of this thief, that salvation is distinct and separate from works.** Now some people tell us we have to work to be saved. What has the man who believes that to say about the salvation of this thief? How is he going to work, when he has nails through both hands and through both feet?

He took the Lord at his word, and believed. It is with the heart men believe, not with their hands or feet. **All that is necessary for a man to be saved is, to believe with his heart.**

Some people say you cannot be saved if you are not baptized. Many people think it is impossible for any one to get into the kingdom of God if he is not baptized into it. I don't want you to think I am talking against ordinances. Baptism is right in its place; but when you put it in the place of salvation, you put a snare in the way. **You cannot baptize men into the kingdom of God.** The last conversion before Christ perished on the cross ought to forever settle that question. **If you tell me a man cannot get into Paradise without being baptized, I answer, This thief was not baptized.**

Was the thief which hung on the cross next to our Lord saved? The answer to this question must be a resounding **yes!** How do we know this? Because Jesus told the thief, "To

day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). This statement settles forever the question regarding the eternal fate of the thief! Jesus said that he would go into paradise and into paradise he went. Yet, if this be the case, then are not the denominations right?! Does the thief’s salvation prove that one may obtain remission of sins today without baptism?

***The Thief On The Cross—Not An Example Of Christian Conversion***

The thief on the cross was not a Christian convert! How could he have been? He was never baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Some might object and argue, “He might have been a disciple of John and therefore baptized with John’s baptism.” So what if he was (and why should we spend time arguing what might have been?! The simple fact is that repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ was not preached until some weeks later in the city of Jerusalem. The thief was born and died under the old law and was not amenable to the command to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.

It is true that the thief on the cross was saved apart from baptism into Christ, but that fact does not in any way authorize one to preach today that the thief’s salvation is exemplary of ours. This man will not be judged according to the law of Christ for he lived and died under another law. We see Moses and Elijah speaking to Christ on the mount of transfiguration (Mat. 17) and do not doubt the salvation of their souls and yet who would argue that since neither of these great men of the Old Testament were baptized for the remission of sins, we can be saved by faith only? And yet, the thief lived and died under the same law of God as them.

Opening to the book of Hebrews we find faithful Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sara all “who died in faith” (Heb. 11:13), and yet what preacher would suggest that



since these died in faith “apart from baptism” we are saved likewise? The Hebrews writer further illuminates that great Old Testament men and women such as Rahab, Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel, and the prophets had received such a report of faith that “the world was not worthy” of their presence (Heb. 11:38). Yet, never do we hear the Protestant preacher suggest that since these celebrated ancients were saved without baptism we also are saved by faith only. The truth is that these were saved by an obedient working faith, the same type of faith by which we are saved today—a faith made perfect by our obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Thus, faithful James would write of Abraham, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, **and by works was faith made perfect**” (Jam. 2:22).

***The New Testament Of Christ—Without Strength Until His Death***

To further expand upon the thought that the thief was not amenable to the law of Christ consider the words of the Hebrews writer:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also **of necessity be the death of the testator**. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise **it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth**. (Heb. 9:15-17)

Prior to His death, Jesus found occasion to extend forgiveness of sins—an action for which He was severely

attacked. Mark's account of the man sick of the palsy is a clear illustration:

And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, **Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.** But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? **who can forgive sins but God only?** And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? **But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,** (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. (Mark 2:4-11)

Abundantly clear is the certainty that, because of the great faith exhibited, Jesus forgave this man of his sins. Furthermore, the reaction of the scribes was both immediate and expected, and in part correct: "who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7). Jesus' declaration, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10), was not a rejection of their conclusion but rather

an ascent to the truth of it and a profession of His deity. Finally, the demonstration of power over the physical realm through the miraculous deed served as conclusive evidence to His claim.

Though this passage is not an example of Christian conversion, it does demonstrate that Jesus, as Deity in the flesh (cf. John 1:1-3; John 1:14; John 5:18; et al.) had the power, authority, and right to offer forgiveness while on this earth. As long as Christ lived He could extend that gift to any He chose, but after His death and the declaration of His will, all who come to Him seeking forgiveness must obtain that precious gift according to His last and final will and testament. What then does the last will and testament of Christ say regarding that blessed and treasured gift of forgiveness? “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16); “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Forgiveness for the thief on the cross was not conditioned upon baptism. Jesus extended forgiveness to this man by divine right, i.e., because Jesus was Deity, He had the divine right to offer it as He saw fit. Were that thief alive today his forgiveness would be, of necessity, according to the will of Jesus Christ, which will is set forth in the preaching of the Gospel. In their superb commentary, *The Fourfold Gospel*, J. W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton rightly reasoned,

Many thoughtlessly make this dying robber the model of death-bed repentance, arguing that others may also be saved in this irregular manner. But Christ had not yet died, and the new testament or covenant was not sealed. Jesus then could change its

terms to suit the occasion. It is therefore no evidence whatever that after his death and in his present glorified state our Lord will in any way change the covenant so as to do away with a single one of the terms required for obtaining remission of sins. (728)

The Protestant doctrine that “no more than a request for salvation made in faith is required by God” is not found in the inspired record of the thief on the cross, nor any other passage of Scripture. Salvation by faith only is a false, fallacious, soul-destroying doctrine that should be rejected and opposed at every instance.

***The Thief On The Cross—Some Lessons Learned***

While the biblical account of the thief on the cross does not teach salvation by grace through faith apart from works, there are many timeless truths found within the inspired record that are worthy of consideration. The need for repentance is clearly taught by the account of the thief on the cross. Early on it seems that both thieves accosted Christ as they hung suspended between heaven and earth (Mat. 27:44), but as the day drew dark and circumstances developed, one of the thieves demonstrated in his words the fruits of repentance: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

The kingship of Jesus and the spiritual nature of the kingdom are also seen in the words of the thief on the cross:

But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath

done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. (Luke 23:40-42)

There can be no doubt that the thief understood Jesus' life on this earth would soon come to an end, and yet he readily acknowledges Jesus would receive a kingdom! Such a remarkable admission reveals a faith that exceeded many of the disciples (cf. Luke 24:19-21).

Another great truth highlighted by the thief is the sinlessness of Jesus: "this man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41). The Hebrews writer declared Jesus' sinless life (Heb. 4:15; Heb. 7:26), as did the apostles Paul (2 Cor. 5:21) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:22). Such an acknowledgement by this thief at the least implies that he was familiar with Jesus' life and work.

Further, the thief confessed the clearly taught truth that punishment for wrongdoing is just: "we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:41). This divine principle is found throughout both Old and New Testaments (Lev. 10:1-2; Heb. 2:1-2; Rom. 6:23).

Finally, the words of the thief on the cross make known that he believed in the established truth of life of the soul after death. There are many who suggest that this life is all there is for man, that when we pass from this life we pass not into eternity but into history. King David found peace in the truth of life of the soul outside of the body (2 Sam. 12:18-23); this truth was taught often by Jesus (John 5:28-29; Mat. 25:31-32).

### **Conclusion**

Paul admonished the elders of the Ephesian church to be watchful for grievous wolves that would teach "perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30-31).

He warned Timothy the time would come when men would no longer desire to hear “sound doctrine” but would “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The doctrines and traditions of man are many, but few are more popular and have led more souls down the path of destruction than the false doctrine of salvation by faith only. Faith without obedience to the divine command of baptism is no faith at all, and a salvation hoped for on the grounds of a faith not made perfect by works is no salvation.

There were those of Jeremiah’s day who cried “Peace, peace” when there was no peace (Jer. 8:11). The false teacher today who seeks to twist the inspired record of the thief on the cross into salvation apart from obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and cry “peace to your soul” is not one particle different from the false teachers of ancient times. Of these false prophets Jehovah revealed, “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).

How do we combat false teachers? How can we turn men from the error of Protestantism to the truth of God’s Word? Simply this: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

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## Elders: Leading The Flock To Heaven

*Gary C. Hampton*



Gary Hampton is married to Teresa, and together they have two children: Nathan and Tabitha. He currently preaches for the Siwell Road congregation in Jackson, Mississippi. Gary has preached in thirty states and six foreign countries, and he also directed the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies for six years. He has published nineteen books and

writes for *The Spiritual Sword* and *The Voice of Truth International*.

### **A Great Responsibility**

Elders have a greater responsibility than the president of the United States. The president watches out for the physical wellbeing of the nation, but elders watch out for the souls of men. Hebrew Christians were instructed, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (NKJV, Heb. 13:17). “They watch over men’s souls, as carefully as shepherds pass sleepless nights—knowing that as God’s stewards they must give account” (Lightfoot 253).

The inspired penman made a clear reference to joy and grief in carrying out the task of watching over the souls of the congregation. “The implication is that already some church leaders of the first century were experiencing grief in their tasks instead of joy. This was of no profit to a congregation” (ibid). The word for “rule” (*hēgeomai*) is found in verses 7, 17, and 24 in Hebrews 13. “This is a general term that makes it impossible to specify any office or the kind of leaders meant. Words from the same root are translated ‘leaders’ and ‘Ruler’ (Mat. 2:6) and ‘governor’ (Acts 7:10).

Therefore *hēgeomai* refers to an influence stronger than that of one who just leads by example” (Pace 565).

### **A Deep Love For Souls**

Paul met with the elders from Ephesus knowing he would never see their faces again (Acts 20:25), so he laid out important principles to guide them in their work. He did that by reminding them of the way in which he had conducted himself while doing his work in the city of Ephesus, saying,

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

He had demonstrated a persistent love for souls that would serve as a good example for God’s shepherds.

The Holy Spirit had made it clear to the apostle that trouble was ahead, including chains and tribulation. “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Paul wanted to see each soul he taught in heaven. He told the Corinthian Christians, “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2). He obviously

considered himself a watchman for souls and did not want to be held accountable for any because of a failure to deliver God's complete message. "Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Elders, who will answer for souls, must do as he did.

Men who exhibit the desire of the Lord will be compelled to sacrifice to see souls enter the heavenly home. Paul described Jesus' love for the church, writing, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

### **Pay Careful Attention To Yourself**

Great leaders know the importance of dedicating themselves before asking anyone else to follow. That may be why Paul first instructed the elders from Ephesus to "take heed to yourselves" (Acts 20:28a). Joshua saw each as having a choice of serving false gods or the true God. He told the people, "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Jos. 24:15). It must be observed that he made a personal choice for God before asking those of his house to follow.

Paul also made a personal choice and then asked others to follow. He declared, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of

Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phi. 3:7-8). He could truthfully say, “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). His willingness to sacrifice, as is demonstrated in these verses, should have made it easier to read his words, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

### **Pay Careful Attention To The Followers**

The apostle to the Gentiles also instructed the shepherds to “take heed...to all the flock” (Acts 20:28b). Joshua first expressed his own determination to follow the Lord and then said he had made the choice for those of his household, knowing the alternative. The Lord knew that was also the nature of Abraham, so He did not hide anything He planned to do to Sodom and Gomorrah from His faithful follower. “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). Jesus stated that anyone not specifically for Him, would be against Him (Mat. 12:30).

Each person is faced with but two choices. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, urged, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mat. 7:13-14). Heaven’s path is as wide as God can make it in keeping with His holy character. Peter stressed that point when he wrote to the scattered Christians. “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be

holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). “Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

### **Be On The Lookout For Wolves**

The church was purchased with Jesus’ own blood, making each member of the body important to the Lord (Acts 20:28c). That was the primary reason behind the care Paul urged the elders to have for themselves and the flock. It was intensified by the knowledge he next expressed. “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). These wolves would come in from outside.

Impending attack from the outside necessitates that elders play the role of watchmen, like Ezekiel of old. Failure to warn of approaching danger will result in the wicked man dying in his iniquity and the watchman having to answer for his blood. Those who had been warned but refused to turn from wickedness would also die in their sins, but the watchman would not have to answer for their blood. “Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand” (Eze. 3:17-20). The weight of watching for the spiritual wellbeing of souls should drive shepherds to their knees often.

### **Wolves May Even Come From Among The Shepherds**

Paul even realized, “Also from among yourselves men will rise up speaking perverse things, to draw away the

disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). It is unfortunate that men who loved the work of the Lord were the very ones to think they saw a better way to protect God’s people than the organizational design set forth in the New Testament. Ignatius of Antioch was one such example. “The great value to Ignatius of the monarchical bishop is a rallying-point of unity, and as the best opponent of heresy” (Walker 42). He saw a real problem with division, as did the inspired apostle (1 Cor. 1:10-13), but his determination to elevate one bishop above the rest of his fellow elders resulted in the beginning of a massive change in the church. He wrote, “Shun divisions as the beginning of evils. Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and the presbytery as the Apostles, and to the deacons pay respect?” (Walker 42).

Ignatius saw looking to a single leader in each church, the bishop, as the best way to promote unity. “Ignatius was concerned about false teaching and schismatic assemblies, and he attempted to counter their influence by insisting on obedience to the clergy and on not doing anything without the consent of the bishop” (Ferguson 107). His arrangement was well-intentioned, but God’s inspired men made no distinction between elders, bishops, and shepherds. Luke reported that Paul called for the *presbuteros* (elders) from Ephesus to come to Miletus (Acts 20:17). The apostle said the Holy Spirit had made them *episcopos* (bishops) (Acts 20:28). Their task with God’s sheep was to *poimainō*, “to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep” (Thayer 527). Peter used essentially the same three words in 1 Peter 5:1-2.

The impact of using the thinking of man, as opposed to following the revealed will of God, cannot be stressed enough. Ignatius’ arrangement, “The three-fold ministry of the local church (bishop, presbyters, deacons) became the general pattern by the mid-second century” (Ferguson 107).

The latter decades of the second century saw a bishop in Corinth around 170, Dionysius, write letters in which he referred “to bishops of the churches to which he wrote and indeed sometimes wrote to bishops of churches (unlike Clement and Polycarp, who wrote to churches, not to fellow bishops)” (Ferguson 107).

### **The Shepherd And The False Teachers**

Titus was left on Crete to appoint elders in every city (Tit. 1:5). One of the characteristics a man had to have to be deemed qualified for that position was “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” (Tit. 1:9). The word translated “exhort” (*parakaleō*) means “to instruct, teach” particularly by calling the one in error to one’s side to further instruct them in truth (Thayer 483). “Convict” (*elenchō*) is “used of the exposure and confutation of false teachers” and must be done if they will not give up their erroneous teaching (Thayer 203).

The apostle went on to describe their destructive work by saying, “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (Tit. 1:10-11). Paul saw these false teachers as “those who contradict” (*antilegō*) or “to speak against, gainsay, contradict” and thus cause division through deceitful talking, leading whole families to follow their errors and continue in them (Thayer 50).

### **A Place To Turn**

God’s shepherds need a place to turn when facing the challenges of false teachers. Paul made it clear Christians must not turn to human wisdom. “Beware lest anyone cheat

you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). He told his son in the faith, “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20-21). The church in Corinth struggled with worldly thinking. The apostle told them,

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

Paul instead urged the Ephesian elders to turn to God when he said, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God” (Acts 20:32a). The Almighty is worthy of commendation because of the promises He has made to us. The apostle reassured the Corinthian brethren, when he wrote, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). He confidently told Timothy, “And



the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:18)! The Ephesian church with which Timothy worked also heard him say, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20).

Paul went immediately from a commendation of God to a commendation of His word, when he said, “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). The word is the means of our avoiding wandering from one new doctrine to another. “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph. 4:14-15). Remember God’s Word is the essence of truth (John 17:17). Peter urged the Christians scattered over the world to, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2).

### **Support The Weak**

Paul took special care to give instructions regarding the weak within the church. He told the Ephesian elders, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:33-35). He gave similar instructions to the church of the Thessalonians (1 The. 5:14). The inspired penman of the epistle to the Hebrews gave an example of how the weak are

to be supported. He compared the Christian life to a race, like a marathon, in which we all run through enemy territory. He declared, “Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:12-13).

The church of God in Corinth struggled with division, which arose from a self-centered approach to life. Paul spent a great deal of time promoting unity and encouraging members of the body to be constantly thoughtful regarding fellow members. The apostle knew actions that were not morally wrong were not sinful, but understood they might not be expedient in building up other Christians. The primary concern ought to be how the action considered might affect someone else. Meat bought in the marketplace, for instance, was well separated from idolatrous practices and came as a blessing from God (Psa. 24:1). A dinner invitation did not have to be considered in light of the source of any meat that would be served unless someone noted it was offered to idols. The apostle then urged abstinence from meat because of the danger of hurting the conscience of the one who called attention to the matter. The Christian would, of course, still have the right to eat, but should forego that right for the sake of the other (1 Cor. 10:23-29).

### **Leading The Flock To Heaven**

Recognition of the eternal importance of the task before them should drive elders to their knees before the Almighty on a regular basis. Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are living examples of that very approach and the success God gave them should encourage us to follow (Dan. 2:14-19; Dan. 6:10-11; Dan. 6:22; Ezra 9:5-15; Neh. 1:1-11). Such love for the Father in heaven will lead shepherds to sacrifice to see each sheep remembers the blood offered by the Savior who

bought them. They will plead with the members of the flock to live for Jesus.

Leading others in the direction of heaven necessitates that each overseer first immerse himself in the word. Self should then be set aside in favor of selfless service to the King. Each follower must be constantly observed to ensure he/she is living a life of purity so as to please the holy God we serve. Flocks will attract the attention of wolves, as well as the roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). Sheep must be cautioned regarding those who will set forth alluring doctrines designed to draw them away from Jesus, the Great Shepherd.

Each leader is in personal danger and susceptible to abusing his honored position to entice God's followers from His fold. Shepherds should safeguard one another by remaining always watchful for dangerous error entering the thinking of a fellow leader. False teachers must be instantly answered with a careful presentation of the truth that will expose their erroneous thinking before it gets a foothold among God's children.

Leaders need a place to turn to refresh themselves for the ongoing battle ahead. Each should have God and His Word held before his eyes constantly. The Father and His Word are the source of sanctification and an eternal home. Care should be taken to lift up the weaker members so they, too, can enter into the heavenly abode.

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## Demons And Angels And Their Eternal Fate

*Westley Hazel*



Westley Hazel is married to Shelley, and together they have two children: Evie and Deacon. Westley has a Bachelor and Master of Divinity degree from Freed-Hardeman University and a Doctorate in Biblical Spirituality. He has done local work in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia. Currently, he is the minister for the Forrest Park church of

Christ in Valdosta, Georgia.

Think back to the moment in your life that you became convicted of your own sin. Your understanding went beyond an acknowledgement of sin and was accompanied with a terrible understanding of the consequence of your sin. You knew that you were lost, destined for an eternity of torment in hell. Most of us look back to that moment of understanding as the day that we came to Christ for His forgiveness of those terrible sins and a wonderful gift of salvation that has changed our lives in ways we never understood in that moment. Think for a moment of how it would be different today if there had been no Gospel to respond to those many years ago. What if there had been no aisle to walk down? What if there was not a story about a God who died in your place? What if there were no such things as an invitation and the opportunity to be born again in Christ? What if you were stuck in your sin with no hope of redemption? As we look at the subject of demons and angels and their eternal fate, this study will serve as a great reminder to every Christian of the immeasurable blessings that we have in God's scheme of redemption and plan of salvation.

In regards to the subject of demons and angels there is a great deal of misinformation floating around the religious and secular world in reference to not only what they are but their activity in this world. This misinformation can be seen in most popular books and movies that touch on the subject. Usually, the portrayal is little more than a complete fabrication of the human mind presented as a factual portrayal. The totality of what we know about demons and angels we know by faith. We know because God has revealed these things to us through His Word. He does not do this through a book on the theology of angels and demons but rather by passing comments and situations that give us small glimpses into a spiritual world and reality that we would know nothing of if it were not revealed to us. The frustrating part of this is that these glimpses in the Scriptures do not give us a complete understanding of demons and angels, thus leaving many questions that we have to be content not understanding while in the flesh. These questions, just as the things that are revealed, are intentional. The nature of creation and spiritual beings was among the questions that God asked Job in Job 38 in order to demonstrate the foolishness of man. The only thing more foolish than not knowing would be to attempt to answer God out of our foolishness.

One of the first things that we might observe about demons and angels in a discussion of their eternal fate is that they are not eternal beings. They are not eternal, without beginning or end, because they are created. This creation or beginning is referenced in Psalm 148:1-5 as the psalmist is praising God for all the things He has created. He writes, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you

waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created” (NKJV, Psa. 148:1-5). Paul also makes reference to this creative act including angelic and spiritual beings in Colossians 1:18, “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” Just because these spiritual beings are not eternal does not mean that they are not immortal, without ending. In fact, these beings are immortal. Jesus makes reference to angels in His discussion of man after the resurrection saying, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34-36). This immortality is important for our discussion because it reveals a continued existence beyond this physical reality. Thus, it begs the question, what happens to these beings in the eternal realm?

The answer of eternal fate for some angels is an easy answer. They will continue in the presence of God to proclaim His praises alongside the saints. John looks to the eternal realm and paints a picture of Christians praising God alongside of the angels in Revelation 7:9-17:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who

sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Of course, this activity is consistent with what many of these heavenly beings have been doing before the judgment of mankind (Isa. 6; Mat. 18:10; Luke 1:19). For those angels who have rebelled against God or demons that have tormented man in the world, the Bible indicates an impending



judgment at the same time of man's judgment wherein they will be tormented for all eternity alongside sinful man.

When Jesus interacted with the demon-possessed men at Gergesenes in Matthew 8 the demons immediately cried out to Jesus, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Mat. 8:29). The demons seemed to have an understanding that a day of punishment and torment was coming and that there was nothing they could do about it. This impending judgment is most likely what the demons had in mind in James 2:17, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" A day of judgment is coming to these evil spiritual beings that is a cause of their great concern and procrastination.

The condemnation will find its ultimate fulfillment in hell itself. Man might tend to think of hell as a destination for the human soul, but it is also the destination of sinful spiritual beings. In Matthew 25 Jesus makes reference to His statement of condemnation for mankind on the judgment day saying, "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" This connection between sinful man and the devil begins in this world (John 8:44) and carries forth even into the eternal hell. Peter uses the example of this eternal punishment for evil spiritual beings to try and convince men that God will condemn man also. His argument is basically if God punished them, don't think that he won't punish you. He writes, "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Again the same argument is made in Jude 6: "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the

judgment of the great day.” All of these verses taken together help to paint a picture of an impending judgment brought upon demons and sinful angels that will take place at the same time man faces the judgment of God. They will be for all eternity in the same hell as man.

Of course the idea of a judgment day and an eternal separation in heaven or hell is not a new concept for any Christian. There seems to be one big difference between the eternal separation that man will experience and the eternal separation that angels and demons will experience. From looking at the Scriptures there is never any indication that these spiritual beings have an opportunity to be forgiven. While this might appear on the surface to be very unfair or unjust, we must acknowledge that grace is not something that God owes even to mankind. If He had never sent His Son to die on the cross and all of man was condemned to hell for eternity, God would only be giving man what he deserves. We must never assume the grace of God.

In 1 Peter 1 the topic of the salvation of man is discussed and how God has worked through the prophets for generations to bring us to the place that we are today. Many times the prophets themselves did not fully comprehend the depth of the message they were sharing for God. He writes in 1 Peter 1:10-12,

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us

they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

The angels were very interested in this scheme of repletion and how God was going to save these sinful people. The implication seems to be that this plan for justification is limited to man with spiritual beings looking from the outside in. Every reference to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus in the Bible is to the salvation of man and not spiritual beings. Even more direct is Hebrews 2:16. The Hebrews writer is making reference to the salvation that God offers to all of mankind through Jesus and that man should not neglect this opportunity. In the midst of this discussion he writes, “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16). Man should appreciate this opportunity to have our sins washed away because there are those beings that have not been extended the same grace.

As we observe the spiritual world through these Biblical glimpses, man sees a portion of God’s creation that has rebelled against His will and now has no way to make that situation right in God’s eyes. There is no second chance. There is no forgiveness. There is only torment deserved by those who have chosen to sin as they await the impending judgment. These facts have very little to do with our human existence, but they ought to make us stop and think. Think about what our sin really deserves. Think about how blessed we are to have the opportunity to be forgiven. Think about the love that Jesus showed for us when He died on the cross. Think about grace as a real gift that will not simply be rejected by some but is not even offered to all. As we reflect on demons and angels and their eternal fate, may it cause us

to think about our eternal fate. Jesus said in Matthew 13:16-17, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” May we never take that blessing for granted.

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# The Doctrine Of The Resurrection: He Was Seen

*Robert R. Taylor, Jr.*



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born in Bradford, Tennessee, in 1931 and was baptized in 1944. On September, 15, 1952, he married Irene, and for the next sixty-four years they walked hand in hand before she passed on to her reward. Robert has two children and four grandchildren. He began preaching in 1949. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, and George Peabody for Teachers. Robert has done local work in Tennessee and Mississippi for fifty-six years, preached in about 500 gospel meetings and over 700 lectureships throughout the nation, and presented over 6,500 sermons on radio and TV. Robert has been with the Ripley, Tennessee, congregation for forty-one years. For twenty-eight years he has helped with a prison ministry and baptized inmates. He has also served as an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies for fifteen years. He has authored thirty-five books and twenty-five tracts. For seventeen and one-half years, Robert 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, lectureships, and an immense amount of time in writing.

## Introduction

It continues to be a deep delight and high honor to speak each July on this wonderful and worthy lectureship. The deepest of gratitude is expressed to Don Blackwell, Robert Jefferies, the elders, and all treasured members of the Southaven congregation for the privilege of speaking in 2017. This congregation is noted for its soundness and a solid stance.

### **Was His Resurrection Bodily?**

Old Testament prophecy so indicated. Psalm 16:10 stresses that His soul would not be left in hadean comfort or paradise and His flesh would not see corruption. This means His crucified body of clay would not remain in the borrowed tomb that was sealed; it would be resurrected or raised up. In his famed sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter's inspired eye was focused on Psalm 16 and from it he quoted (Acts 2:25-32).

Various ones who witnessed Him subsequent to His resurrection saw Him bodily. He was not just spirit. In Luke 24:37 some of His disciples "supposed that they had seen a spirit" (KJV). The resurrected Redeemer corrected them by stating forcefully, "Behold my hands and feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet" (Luke 24:39-40).

Certain of His female disciples saw Him on His resurrection day and "held Him by the feet" (Mat. 28:9). Doubting Didymus (Thomas) was challenged by Jesus: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). Thomas did not have to follow through for he now saw the resurrected Jesus and believed. He now knew it was a bodily resurrection. Faith now replaced his former faithlessness.

### **Why Was His Resurrection Important To His People?**

The longest Pauline chapter of the hundred he wrote, 1 Corinthians 15, delineates the needed answer. This sublime answer is **very important**.

Some at Corinth had begun to deny their own future resurrection while still accepting Christ's resurrection. Paul demonstrated that both stand on the same fundamental footing. If Christ were raised, as indeed He was, then their

future resurrection was a matter of strict surety. However, if there be no future resurrection for them, then Christ's resurrection never occurred (1 Cor. 15:13). However, if there will not be a future resurrection or a past resurrection of the Christ, apostolic preaching was falsified (1 Cor. 15:15). If Christ be not raised, these unbelievers were still in all their sins; not a single sin had been forgiven nor would there ever be any pardon in their future (1 Cor. 15:17). Furthermore, your loved ones, now dead, are perished (1 Cor. 15:18). A denial of the Bible doctrine of the resurrection, both Christ's and theirs, made of all disciples a miserable set of men (1 Cor. 15:19). In subsequent verses Paul powerfully exhibited the validity of Christ's resurrection in the past and their resurrection in the future. Christ's resurrection stamps as a valid certainty our own resurrection. Reject the Bible doctrine of the resurrection and the entire structure of Christianity collapses. In Sadducean form this unbelief meant death ends everything (Acts 23:8). Surely, these misguided Corinthians were not ready for all this!

### **What Proof Is There That The Resurrection Of Christ Occurred?**

A trio of wonderful words supplies accuracy of answer, "He was seen." In the opening part of 1 Corinthians 15 Paul used this trio of power-paced words four times:

1. "He was seen" by Cephas or Simon Peter (1 Cor. 15:5).
2. "He was seen" by more than five hundred witnesses (1 Cor. 15:6).
3. "He was seen" by James, apparently His fleshly brother who previously had been an unbeliever (1 Cor. 15:7; John 7:5).
4. "He was seen" by Paul (1 Cor. 15:8).

These three words "**He was seen**" are among the most

important words in the entire Bible. Two reliable witnesses would have met the criterion suggested by Jesus in John 8:17. Here we have hundreds of eyewitnesses and ear witnesses that He was raised from the dead. I shall now number and note fourteen appearances that He made subsequent to His resurrection.

**1. “He Was Seen” First By Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9)**

Human wisdom would have suggested a first appearance either to Mary, His mother, or to His chosen apostles. Instead He chose Mary to be first. She had been last at the cross and first at His tomb site (Mark 15:42; John 20:1). She was not His wife as some misled and misguided religionists have concluded. She had been a faithful and devoted disciple.

**2. “He Was Seen” By Faithful, Fervent Female Followers (Mat. 28:9-10)**

Included in this group may have been His mother Mary, Salome, Joanna, and Susanna (Mark 15:40; Luke 8:3). Mary Magdalene may have been with this group also which would be her second time to see Him. They saw Him; they heard Him. This adds up to visual and audible proof!

**3. “He Was Seen” By Simon Peter (1 Cor. 15:5)**

Luke 24:34 also alludes to this appearance to Peter. This must have meant much to the denying disciple during Christ’s trials. Thrice Peter denied his Lord (Mat. 26:69-75). He wept deeply over these daring denials (Mat. 26:75). Thus he repented of these denials. The ever forgiving Christ had not abandoned erring Peter. He was restored. Later he would be heaven’s choice to preach the great sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.



#### 4. “He Was Seen” By The Emmaus Travelers

Only Luke and briefly Mark tell of this appearance (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12-13). Earlier in Luke’s description the two discussing disciples spoke of Jesus as the past prophet. Yet amazingly, Jesus was the present **prophet** and was walking in their very presence. Only later will they realize that this **stranger** with them was in reality the risen Redeemer. Their slowness in recognizing Him may be determined by Mark’s account that suggested He appeared in another form to them (Mark 16:12). They experienced “burning hearts” as He conversed with them. It would be of signal interest to know all they experienced with burning hearts (Luke 24:32). I once heard the late and lamented Noel Meredith preach an entire sermon on this text. Later he put it into a book he published in 1983, *Life With A Purpose* (29-40). It was a monumental insight injected by this great Biblical scholar.

#### 5. “He Was Seen” By Ten Apostles (John 20:19-25)

The traitor, Judas Iscariot, was no longer in the picture. For some undisclosed cause Thomas was not present with the ten. This was the Lord’s Day evening and Thomas does not occupy a seat among his fellow apostles. Hence, only ten were present. Thomas was not the last one of Christ’s people to miss Lord’s Day evening services. I did local work with five different congregations from 1954 to 2010 (or fifty-six years). I have preached in over five hundred gospel meetings and about 750 lectureships. I can count on one hand the congregations who had as many in Sunday night, Wednesday night, or gospel meeting attendance as Sunday morning attendance. Brother Keith Mosher, Sr., has preached for some fifty years. He recently wrote that he had never known of any congregation where every member was present for all of a gospel meeting or congregational lectureship.

Several years ago I preached in a gospel meeting where three hundred plus were present for Sunday morning. I urged every member to be present on Sunday night and the weekday nights through Friday. After I had finished my sermon one of the elders joined me in requesting every member to be present for all the nights of the meeting. I wondered how many would come back for all the night services. I had my answer Sunday evening when only about fifty percent returned and about forty percent Monday night through Friday night.

What a loss Thomas sustained by being absent. He missed getting to see and be with Jesus. He rejected the testimony of ten reliable apostles. He remained in unbelief for a full week. Non-attenders today who do not frequent Sunday and Wednesday night services are sure losers.

Several years ago I had a Sunday morning only attender request that I speak on a Bible topic. It just so happened that I had spoken on that exact subject a short time before. But I gave the lesson on a Sunday evening and he was not there to hear it.

What a great, glorious, and grand day this must have been for Mary Magdalene, the women, the Emmaus duet, Simon Peter, and the ten apostles as they saw and heard the newly resurrected Redeemer the very day He vacated the sealed sepulcher.

## **6. “He Was Seen” One Week Later By The Eleven**

Thomas was present for this appearance. Why had he been so reluctant to accept apostolic testimony? He had met their attractive affirmation that Jesus was alive with daring disbelief. He had lived all his life under the Mosaic system which stated succinctly that truth should be accepted on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deu. 17:4). In John 8:17 Jesus stated the accepted number to be two. Quite likely Thomas would have heard Jesus give this very number. In

this case there were five times the number Jesus had taught. This meant that twenty eyes and twenty ears had seen and heard Him vouchsafing His resurrection. Thomas had rejected an impressive number of honest, reliable witnesses. Did he not know his fellow apostles to be men of integrity who surely would not lie about something this momentous? In years ahead would not Thomas expect his auditors to receive his preaching testimony concerning Christ's resurrection? If they failed to believe, would he not see his past portrait staring him in the face? Surely, he would!

Jesus challenged him to put finger and hand into the crucified spots and no longer hang on to his unbelief. He did not have to do this because he knew Jesus, his Lord, was alive. He confessed, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus responded, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

### **7. "He Was Seen" By The Seven In Galilee**

At the Sea of Tiberias (or Sea of Galilee) He was seen by those whose names were Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John, and two unnamed disciples. They had gone fishing but had caught nothing through the night. The stranger on the Galilean shore, the Christ, told them to cast their net on the right side of the ship and they would find. And find they did. The net enclosed a multitude of great fish, 153 big ones to be exact (John 21:6, 11). John recognized his Lord and informed Peter who promptly left the ship and headed for the shore. I suppose he thought, "this ship is entirely too slow in getting me to the Master." It was on this occasion that Peter is asked thrice if he loved the Lord. He answered in the affirmative three times. Each time the Lord had a work for Peter to be executed. Perhaps there is kinship between this thrice-asked query and Peter's having denied Him three

times. At this time Peter's future is portrayed for him. Promptly, he asked about John's future. In essence, Jesus told him to take care of Peter and his work and he would take care of that disciple whom He loved. A false rumor went forth in regard to John which he promptly corrected.

### **8. "He Was Seen" By More Than Five Hundred**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John do not mention this appearance but Paul does in his great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15. Paul wrote this some twenty-five years subsequent to the resurrection. Some of this number had fallen asleep (had died) but others were very much alive. This noble number means more than a thousand eyes had seen Him and more than a thousand ears had heard Him. This was highly impressive testimony relative to the validity of His resurrection. Could so many be deceived and what could they hope to attain if their testimony was false? Reason and logic answer with a crystal clear negative. Paul knew the power of this high number and used it most effectively in his courageous chapter on the resurrection both of the Christ and all others as well.

### **9. "He Was Seen" By James**

Only Paul relates this appearance and he does it in 1 Corinthians 15. This James was not Zebedee's son or Alphaeus' son but His own half-brother. They had the same mother (Mary) but Jesus was born of the virgin having no earthly father that begat Him. Uniquely, He had a mother on earth but no mother in heaven; He had a Father in heaven but no earthly father that had begotten Him. This amazing appearance, seemingly, is what changed James into a believer as well as his three brothers—Joses, Judas, and Simon. They were unbelievers in His Messiahship in John 7:5. Subsequent to His crucifixion they were with other believers in the upper

room (Acts 1:14). Later, two of His brothers, James and Jude, will each pen a New Testament epistle. How far reaching this appearance was!

### **10. “He Was Seen” By The Eleven In Galilee**

This appearance is given us by Matthew (Mat. 28:16). It was in this setting that He gave the Great Commission according to Matthew. They were to make disciples and baptize the taught ones into the noble names of the Timeless Trinity (Mat. 28:19). A lifetime of heavenly protection would abide them. Either here or in another appearance He gave the Great Commission according to Mark 16:15-16.

### **11. “He Was Seen” By The Eleven On Ascension Day**

Mark and Luke both allude to this amazing event. Luke will refer to this again in Acts 1. He alone informs us that Jesus’ stay on earth subsequent to His resurrection was forty days in duration. Putting this information by the side of Acts 2 enables us to ascertain that He must have been back in heaven a full ten days before the church was established in perfection on Pentecost. There were fifty days separating the Passover season, when He was crucified, and Pentecost. Pentecost means fiftieth. Forty of these days were spent here which leaves ten days being in heaven before He established His church or kingdom on earth. Kingdom and church refer to the same institution, premillennialism to the contrary notwithstanding! These error-filled people say He established the church as a substitute but the kingdom was put on long distant hold! They say He has not yet established His kingdom. If we have no kingdom, then we have no valid born-again experience. No kingdom and no new birth means no salvation for any person Jew or Gentile. Yet, a lady once told me I was entirely too hard on premillennialism saying it was innocent and harmless doctrine. Innocent and harmless

do not fit this lethal “ism.” It is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Spirit, anti-Bible, anti-Gospel, anti-truth and anti-good common sense. It is lethal to its very depth. Premillennialists have to do the same with the Bible as the A. D. 70 advocates do—rewrite the Good Book.

Acts 1:8 is his final message to His apostles as He outlined their work—in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and then to the utter part of the earth. The Book of Acts shows they followed this divinely given instruction. Then he was taken into heaven. They saw Him lifted up until a cloud hid Him from their gazing eyesight.

### **12. “He Was Seen” By Stephen In Acts 7**

The closing verses of Acts 7 furnish us this information. Heaven was opened to Stephen who was to become the first Christian martyr. He saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. He conversed with Jesus just prior to his stoning by enraged Jews and he informed his murderers what he saw. They should have done what three thousand did on Pentecost or what a group of priests did in Acts 6:7. Instead they stoned Stephen. Stalward Stephen prayed for his enemies much like Jesus did in Luke 23:34 or how Paul was to do later in 2 Timothy 4:16.

### **13. “He Was Seen” By Saul On The Damascus Road**

Saul was traveling to this Syrian city to persecute the disciples of Jesus as we observe in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26. When Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him he became an instant believer. Three days later he completed his obedience to the Gospel and then became the persecuted one by his former cronies. His sins were not removed on the Damascus Road. One preacher wore out his imagination by affirming that Saul was saved between the time he fell from his stallion and he hit the Syrian ground. One of our preachers

responded, “Have I been reading Acts 9 all these many years and missed such a thing as a horse in this chapter?” He did not call it a mid-air conversion but this is what it was if right. Luke mentions no such creature in Acts 9, Acts 22, or Acts 26!

#### **14. “He Was Seen” By John On Patmos**

John had been banished to this isle sometime before. Revelation 1 paints this beautiful appearance of victorious Jesus to John the aged apostle. In 1973 the late and lamented E. R. Harper and I were on a lectureship in Midwest City, Oklahoma. Brother Harper was assigned the subject, “The Beautiful Christ.” He based his tremendous sermon on Revelation 1. It was one of the greatest and sweetest tributes to Jesus I have ever heard. It has been some forty-four years since I heard this lesson and I still remember its stirring beauty. It was of eloquent beauty, dignity, and majesty. Brother Harper was in his seventies at that time but was still in his intellectual prime. Why not take time this very day to read all twenty verses of this wonderful and worthy chapter?

#### **Conclusion**

There is far more proof that Christ was resurrected from that sealed sepulcher than that Alexander the Great conquered the world, that Julius Caesar ruled Rome, that Columbus discovered America in 1492, or that Shakespeare lived in the 1500’s and 1600’s and did his wonderful writing which still challenges modern literature lovers. Someone may say, “Oh, but we have his writings preserved.” But we have the wonderful and worthy New Testament written by eight selected scribes telling us all we need to know about His coming to the earth, what He did while here, and what He has done and is doing in heaven.

Men in multitude have believed fully and firmly that

He was raised from the dead and now reigns in heaven at Jehovah's right hand. We join Paul in saying, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57), and John who 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).

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## How Beautiful Heaven Must Be

*LaDon Sain*



LaDon Sain has been married to Paul for the last fifty-two years. Together they have four daughters and seven granddaughters. For the past 40 years she and Paul have published more than 70 books and tracks on a yearly basis, as well as the *Studying Through the Bible* classroom material, through Sain Publications. They also own Sain Video Productions where they direct and produce multiple programs each month that air on *Fox, Inspiration, and Gospel Broadcasting Network* programs.

### Introduction

May I express my appreciation to the elders and brethren Blackwell and Jefferies for the invitation to speak at this wonderful Southaven lectureship. It is my pleasure and honor to be a part of it. What a marvelous theme for this series: **“Great Songs We Sing.”** It has been a joy to examine this topic and be reminded afresh of what the inspired Scriptures tell us regarding our eternal home.

The song assigned to me is **“How Beautiful Heaven Must Be.”** The lyrics for this ageless beautiful hymn was written by Mrs. A. S. (Cordie) Bridgewater (1873-1957). Very little is known about her except that she was born in North Carolina and married A. Samuel Bridgewater from Tennessee. The couple lived near Hanceville, Alabama, from 1909 to 1917, where he farmed. It is believed that she produced the words to “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be” during this time. They apparently moved from Hanceville around 1917, and no further records of them have been found.

Let us take each line of the song and make a few applications to our lives as God’s people today.

### **Inspiring Lyrics**

#### ***Verse 1, The First Phrase...“We Read Of A Place That’s Called Heaven”***

There are so many verses of Scripture that refer to heaven. Let’s notice a few of them. First, turn in your Bible to John 14:1-3:

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. (KJV)

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John gives us a glimpse into what heaven will be. In Revelation 21, verse 1, we see that it will be a “new heaven and a new earth.” Notice in verse 2, John speaks of a holy city, a new Jerusalem, a bride adorned for her husband.

Think back to the day of your wedding. How were you adorned? Did you wear your jeans, your sweats, your capris or did you wear a beautiful wedding gown for your groom to see as you (walking down the aisle) stepped into his view to meet him—a bride adorned for her husband?

In heaven, God is making provisions for His faithful children. In Revelation 21, verse 3, we read, “they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” As we journey here on earth, God is with us, He will never forsake or leave us—but how amazing that one day we will live forever with Almighty God and His Holy Son, our Savior!

### **Please Allow Me To Tell You Of A Life Changing Day**

Heaven became a little sweeter for Paul and me on March 3, 1966. It was just a normal beautiful day. Sun shining, birds chirping, trees budding, green grass growing, flower blooming, and all the beautiful things that the new spring brings.

Paul was in his office studying and I was feeding our beautiful six weeks old baby girl, *Steffany Mischelle*. After lunch I put Mischelle down for her nap. I thought it would be a good time to steal a nap so I laid down on the couch for a few minutes. After a bit I awoke from the nap and, as all mothers would do, I went to the bedroom to check on Mischelle. The horror I saw that day will be etched in my mind forever. Michelle was **not** breathing. Her tiny little body was purple—except for her cheek where she was laying.

I screamed for Paul and as fast as we could we rushed for the hospital—hoping above hope that she would be okay. But it was too late! At the very young age of six weeks, Mischelle had been taken by the angels into Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:22), awaiting all of God’s faithful children. Truly, heaven became a sweeter place for us that day.

As a side note, our three daughters never had the privilege of seeing their sister so they decided that whoever had the first girl, she would be named “Steffany Mischelle.” Our “now” Steffany Mischelle, daughter of our youngest daughter Heather, will walk down the aisle on June 17 to marry the love of her life.

### ***Verse 1, The Second Phrase...“It’s Made For The Pure And The Free”***

Most Christians can quote Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The word “pure” means spotless, without blemish, free from impurities. When a man and a woman are joined together in marriage it is

God's desire that they have kept themselves totally pure sexually and have saved themselves for their mate for life. Listen to a description of heaven:

There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lambs book of life. (Rev. 21:27)

Just think, in heaven, there will be no liars, no murderers, no slanderers, no atheists, no fearful or those who sow discord! Won't that be heavenly? Do you not want to go there?

***Verse 1, The Third Phrase...“These Truths In God's Word He Has Given”***

The apostle of love says,

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me. (John 15:2)

In John 17:17, John further says, “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.”

Now look at Isaiah 65:17-18,

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

The book of Romans (chapter 8, verses 18-25) gives us an expectation of the blessings we can see in our future if we are faithful. Psalm 16:11 says, “You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand, are pleasures forevermore.”

***Verse 2, The First Phrase...“In Heaven, No Drooping, Nor Pining”***

Are you a “drooper”? Do you ever sit around and think of things that you wish you had, or wish you did not have, or maybe wish you were some other place, rather than where you are at that moment? Some days when it’s raining outside, those dark clouds start rolling in and the forecast is for rain the next three days, I must confess I get a little droopy.

What does the word “pining” mean. It is found only once in the Scriptures. Notice in Isaiah 38:12,

Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a Shepherd’s tent: I have cut off like a weaver my life: he will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.

I pray I never get to that point in my life. We are all so blessed with a God who loves us and gives us a roof over our heads, food in the pantry, a loving husband, loving children and grandchildren. What else could we possibly want in life?

The tragedy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania helps us to recall the many blessings of God in this life for which to be thankful—but there are many trials and tribulations, problems and difficulties, heartaches and sorrows that occur during our lives. At all times, and especially at times like such tragedies as 9/11, we need to remember “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be.”

The writer of Hebrews informs us, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). If there was “only” a rest in heaven, and nothing more, it would still be worth all our trials and temptations. “Won’t that be heavenly?”

***Verse 2, The Second Phrase...“No Wishing For Elsewhere To Be”***

We spend our lives doing the things that will prepare us to live eternally with God in heaven. While we are yet on earth, we hear Jesus urge us to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth (Mat. 6:19). The apostle Paul pleads for Christians to set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth (Col. 3:1-3).

Dear ones, when we have crossed over Jordan, when death takes us away from the earthly trials, persecutions, and sorrows, and we are finally **home**, we will never wish for elsewhere to be.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. (Rev. 21:4)

Have you ever heard someone say “you are wishing your life away?” When we were younger, we could hardly wait to turn thirteen to finally be a teenager. We could hardly wait to be sixteen so we could get our driver’s license. Then we were impatient until the time we were able to get married. Then we wanted so much to have children. And then we were “really” anticipating having grandchildren.

Our life flies by, minute by minute, and then one day we look up and we wonder where in the world our life has gone. “Life began with waking up and looking into my

mother's face" (George Elliott). When my life ends I will look into the face of my loving Savior. Truly, how beautiful heaven will be!

***Verse 2, The Third Phrase... "God's Light Is Forever There Shining"***

The truth is stated in Revelation 22:5,

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Do you ever feel a little depressed on those cold, cloudy days when the sun does not shine at all? I must admit I do. I love bright, sun shiny days. I love being outside on the mower, or planting flowers, or even cleaning windows—just anything to get me outside (but just not too early in the morning). My dear friend, Irene Taylor, and I share the same view on this subject. She said that if God wanted her to see the sun, it was just as bright at five o'clock in the afternoon as it was at five o'clock in the morning. I agree with that whole heartily.

In heaven we will have no need for the sun or the moon because the glory of God will lighten it (Rev. 21:23).

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. (Ecc. 11:7)

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psa. 119:105)

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and

Christ shall give thee light. (Eph. 5:14)

***Verse 3, The First Phrase...“Pure Waters Of Life There Are Flowing”***

Once again, we look at the special word “pure.” The Greek word for “pure” is “*katharos*” and means without blemish, spotless, free from impurities. John the revelator says, “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1).

How many of you have ever tasted water from a spring that comes out of the ground? The water is crystal clear and tastes wonderful. I recall one which was known as “Peggy Ann Springs” in western Kentucky where I spent the first seventeen years of my life. It has been flowing for hundreds of years. My mother and daddy would take our water jugs and fill them up with the spring water and take them home for us to drink. Nothing tasted better than that ice cold water. As far as I know, it still flows to this day.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.  
And let him that heareth say, Come. And  
let him that is athirst come. And whosoever  
will, let him take the water of life freely.  
(Rev. 22:17)

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8). Our hearts must be just that pure if we want to enjoy eternity in heaven.

***Verse 3, The Second Phrase...“All Who Will Drink May Be Free”***

Think for a second that you are lost, walking in a barren wasteland, a desert. You see nothing in front of you or behind you except sand and maybe a cactus. Your mouth is so



dry that it is hard to even speak. Right then, what would you give for a glass of cold water?

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (Rev. 21:6)

Remember when Jesus came to rest at Jacob's well in the heat of the day? While He was there, a woman from Samaria came to draw water from the well. Jesus asked her to give Him a drink. She did not understand because He was a Jew and the Jews hated the Samaritans. Jesus told her about a water that would spring up into everlasting life. She said to Jesus, "Give me this water" (John 4:5-15).

Jesus said during His earthly ministry,

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37-38)

Perry Boardman wrote,

When life's short day is done at last and  
Heaven's gates open wide.  
Pain and sorrow will be past and I'll cast  
my cares aside.  
I'll walk upon the streets of gold and  
breathe pure celestial air.  
What beautiful sights I'll behold with the

saints and angels there.  
Jesus will be waiting for me with all His  
glory shown.  
I'll live with him eternally in pleasures I've  
never known.

***Verse 3, The Third Phrase...“Rare Jewels Of Splendor  
Are Glowing”***

In Revelation 21:18-21, the jewels itemized are glorious for our minds to consider. Let's look at some of them:

1. **Jasper** - a reddish yellow, brown or green.
2. **Sapphire** - a dark blue.
3. **Chalcedony** – bluish-green quartz.
4. **Emerald** – beautiful light green.
5. **Sardonyx** – white or grayish-brown.
6. **Sardius** – orangish-red.
7. **Chrysolite (or Peridot)** – dull yellow to black.
8. **Topaz** – deep orange, pink, red, or blue.
9. **Chrysoprasus** – bright apple green.
10. **Jacinth** (Hyacinth) – blue from the flower.
11. **Amethyst** – purple.

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl.” And then, of course, the beautiful street of “pure gold”, like “transparent glass”, as we read in Revelation 21:21. We may have some of these stones in rings, or bracelets, or earrings, but I am confident that none of us have a “street of gold” to walk on each day.

We can only attempt to imagine “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be,” and then it will pale in comparison to the real place. If we are faithful to our heavenly Father we will receive that crown of life and we will view the beautiful street of gold for ourselves.

***Chorus***

In the chorus we find the declaration again of the title

of the song, “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be!” A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father. Wondering, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed: “Oh Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be?” (Charles L. Allen, in *Home Fires*). There is no possible way our minds can imagine what we will see when we step into that beautiful home of the soul. It will be JOY with the Lord, with His people, and joy because trials, pain and sorrows will be no more! Life on earth will end and eternity will begin! Further in the chorus we find two additional phrases.

***The First Phrase...“Sweet Home Of The Happy And Free”***

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God. (Psa. 146:5)

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (Pro. 29:18)

In this life, there is **no** place I would rather be than at home. Sure, there is never-ending work that must be done around a house. But I love every one of them. People say I am crazy, but I love to clean house. I love to work in the yard, climb up on the roof to clean gutters, wash windows, and other similar jobs.

God has blessed me with a wonderful life. He has blessed me with a wonderful family, a wonderful husband and awesome children and grandchildren. I believe HE expects me to take care of all the precious things I have been given—even cleaning the house. I am the happiest when I am at home. Genesis 2:15 says man was put in the garden “to dress

it and keep it.” The many things that God has given us, I think He expects us to dress it and keep it. My goal is to keep my home where I would never be ashamed for anyone to come unexpected for a visit. We owe that to our heavenly Father. Sadly, we have been in many homes where I was ashamed for them because their home was not dressed and kept.

Are you ever discouraged by events around you? Do you sometimes fear the future realizing there is **no hope** for this world? Then raise your sights, look up and be encouraged. Christ is preparing a beautiful future home for His children—a place more spectacular than we can even imagine. We will be free from all trials and heartaches of this life.

To those who have learned to love and trust Jesus, the prospect of meeting Him face to face and being with Him forever is **the hope** that keeps us going, no matter what life may throw at us.

***The Second Phrase...“Fair Haven Of Rest For The Weary”***

Consider the word *rest*.

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. (Mat. 11:28-30)

Revelation 14:13:

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.

In one of his books, A. M. Hunter, relates the story of a dying man who asked his Christian doctor to tell him about the place where he was going. As the doctor fumbled for a reply, he heard a scratching at the door, and he had his answer. “Do you hear that?” he asked his patient. “It’s my dog. I left him downstairs, but he has grown impatient, and has come up and hears my voice. He has no notion what is inside this door, but he knows that I am here. Isn’t it the same way with you? You don’t know what lies beyond the door, but you know that your Master is there.”

We don’t know when our time will come to see beyond the door. We must be ready at any time to meet our Father.

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)

What a beautiful song that can give us such **hope** and **joy** and **anticipation** of the home that awaits us some day. “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

### **Conclusion**

Some time ago a California preacher announced that he would speak the following Sunday on heaven. During that week, he received a letter from an old man who was very interested in the topic. The letter is a beautiful expression of faith, and in part, follows:

Next Sunday you are to talk about HEAVEN. I am interested in that land, because I have held a clear title to a bit of property there for over 55 years. I did not buy it. It was given to me without money without price. But the donor purchased it for me at a tremendous sacrifice. I am not holding it for speculation, since the title is not transferable. It is not a vacant lot. For more than half a century I have been sending material out of which the greatest Architect and Builder of the universe has been building a home for me, which will never need repair because it will suit me perfectly, individually, and it will never grow old.

Termites can never undermine its foundations for they rest upon the Rock of Ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. No locks or bolts will ever be placed upon its doors, for no vicious person can ever enter that land where my dwelling stands, now almost completed and already ready for me to enter and abide in peace eternally, without fear of being rejected. There is a valley of deep shadows between the place where I live in California and that to which I shall journey in a short time. I cannot reach my home in that city of God without passing through that dark valley of shadows. But I am not afraid because the best friend that I ever had, went through the same valley long,

long ago and drove away all its gloom. He has stuck by me through thick and thin since we first became acquainted 55 years ago, and I shall not lose my way when He is with me.

I hope to hear your sermon on HEAVEN next Sunday, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to Heaven has no date marked for the journey – no return coupon – and no permit for baggage. Yes, I am ready to go and I may not be here while you are talking next Sunday, but I shall meet you there some day.”

I will never sing this song, “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be” the same way again. At times we may sing songs without feeling, just words. This song will forever have a special meaning for me each time I sing it.

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## You Never Mentioned Him To Me

*Kathy Pollard*



Kathy Pollard is a graduate of Faulkner University. Her husband, Neal, preaches for the Bear Valley church of Christ in Denver, Colorado. They have three sons: Gary, Dale, and Carl. On January 1, 2017, they gained a daughter-in-law, Chelsea. Kathy is an instructor in the Women's Program at the Bear Valley Bible Institute International, a director of Higher Ground (a Bible camp for teen girls), and the author of *Return to Me—What to Do When Loved Ones Fall Away*. She contributes to the Bible-marking feature at Come Fill Your Cup ([www.comefillyourcup.com](http://www.comefillyourcup.com)) and writes her own blog ([www.life-and-favor.com](http://www.life-and-favor.com)). Kathy enjoys reading, playing tennis, studying herbalism, and collecting English teacups and vintage linens.

“You never mentioned Him to me. You helped me not the light to see. You met me day by day and knew I was astray, yet never mentioned Him to me.” The words to this song by James Rowe are meant to serve as a sober reminder of our responsibility to reach the lost. Time is running out. When the day of judgment comes, we will not have another opportunity to save a soul. The song reminds us to think souls, to see those around us as people in need of a Savior.

We have the Good News and it is the “power of God that brings salvation to everyone” (NKJV, Rom. 1:16). What keeps us from sharing it? Perhaps we fear the consequences. We may experience rejection or it may strain a relationship. Perhaps we are having a hard time getting over a sinful past so we feel hypocritical talking about Jesus. Maybe we think we do not know enough about the Bible.

The truth is soul winning is simple. Satan does not want us to know that. He wants us to think we are not good

enough, bright enough, or courageous enough to open the Bible with someone. He wants us to feel like it is no use because no one is interested. Are we going to believe Satan's lies?

Let us focus instead on the facts. First, God is with us. When Paul was getting discouraged in a city that seemed so anti-Christian, God said, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10). Second, we have hope. This motivated Paul. "Since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech" (2 Cor. 3:12). Third, the power is from God, not us. "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord...that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:5-7). And fourth, the word of God is effective. It "effectively works in you who believe" (1 The. 2:13).

There was a man who once said, "You'll never catch me inside a church building!" Now he is a Christian. He is passionate about soul winning. He serves as a deacon over missions. The Good News is powerful! It still changes lives. With this in mind, what are some practical ways we can become soul winners?

### **Make It Personal**

There are many ways to promote the Gospel—generous giving, supporting missionaries, and sending cards to visitors. These are excellent, necessary things. But what have you done personally to put the Word into your neighbor's hands?

#### ***There Are People Perhaps Only You Can Reach***

They are your neighbors, co-workers, family members, and friends. If you do not warn them, who will (Eze. 33:18-19)? If you do not persuade them, who will (2 Cor. 5:10)? If you do not compel them, who will (Luke 14:23)? If you do not share the Gospel with them, who will

(Mark 16:15)? If you don't turn them from sinner to saved, who will (Jam. 5:19-20)?

“My Long Lost Soul” by John Masaitis

You lived next door to me for years.  
We shared our dreams, our joys, our tears.  
A friend to me you were indeed.  
A friend who helped me when in need.  
My faith in you was strong and sure.  
We had such trust as should endure.  
No spats between us ever rose.  
Our friends alike and so our foes.  
What sadness, then, my friend to find,  
That after all you weren't so kind.  
The day my life on earth did end,  
I found you weren't a faithful friend.  
For all those years we spent on earth,  
You never talked of second birth.  
You never spoke of my lost soul,  
Of the Messiah who'd make me whole.  
I plead today from Hell's cruel fire  
And tell you now my last desire.  
You cannot do a thing for me,  
No words today my bond will free.  
But do not err, my friend, again.  
Do all you can for souls of men.  
Plead with them now quite earnestly,  
Lest they be cast in Hell with me.

***You Can Answer The Lord's Prayer***

Jesus made the most of every opportunity to preach and teach. He prayed that His disciples would do the same. “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with

compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Mat. 9:35-38).

The harvest is still plentiful. Are you an answer to the Lord’s prayer? The laborers are still few. Are you one of His laborers?

### **Remember Your Purpose**

I will never forget the example set for me by our sister in Christ, Stephanie Stafford. We had a brief contact with a business woman visiting from another country. Stephanie surprised me by saying to her, “If you died right now, would you go to heaven?” The woman answered, “I think so.” Stephanie said, “Let me show you something.” She then opened her Bible and spent half an hour studying with this stranger. The woman said, “I feel like my eyes have been closed but now they are opened a little bit.” Stephanie knew we would most likely never meet this woman again. Even though she only had a small window of opportunity, she took advantage of it by planting the Seed in her heart. The purpose of soul winning is to introduce the world to God’s will, one soul at a time.

A couple of men were walking on a road. Jesus came along and began walking with them. The men’s eyes were restrained and they did not know Him. Jesus began teaching the Scriptures to them concerning Himself. “Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him” (Luke 24:13-31). That is our goal!

These men had been talking about the crucifixion when Jesus came upon them, yet they still did not know Him. You can probably think of some friends who think they know Jesus. They may know He is God’s Son and that He died on a

cross. But do they know His will and His plan of salvation? Do they know that He is the head of His church? After Jesus left those men, “They said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” That is the purpose we are to remember! We are simply trying to help others see and know Jesus. “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

### **Be Passionate**

It does not take long for others to determine what you are passionate about. Your eyes will light up when you talk about it. You will make time for it. You will look for opportunities to share it with and involve others. Whether it is a person, a hobby, or a cause, what we love eventually comes up in our conversations.

If we love the Word (Psa. 119:97) and we love souls (1 John 4:7-8), it should be obvious to those around us. God’s Word will keep coming up in our speech because we love souls. The old saying is true, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Jeremiah’s passion led him to share God’s Word even when discouraged. “His word in my heart was like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not” (Jer. 20:9). Peter and John were told never to speak the name of Jesus again. Their passion was greater than any threat though. They said, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Paul said, “Woe is me.” He did not say it when he was beaten, shipwrecked, hungry, stoned, or thrown into prison. He said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). The Christians in the early church who were persecuted “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). The Gospel was in their hearts so it was on their tongues!

### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

We can get excited, study up on some Scriptures, and even research techniques but those will not do one lost soul any good unless we put them to use.

#### ***Just Get Started***

The only way to remove fear or whatever is holding us back is to just do it. Hud Griffith is a prolific soul winner. My husband finally asked him, “What is your secret?” Hud replied, “I go up to someone and say, ‘Will you have a Bible study with me?’” It is that easy. Surely you know someone right now that you can approach with that very question.

Remember, Satan wants us to think soul winning is harder than it is. He wants us to feel like everyone will be turned off if we try to share the Word with them. Some will be turned off. But some will not! How tragic if we withhold the Good News because we have predetermined how we think others will respond!

#### ***Equip Yourself***

There are some simple things you can do to be ready for those open doors. As you’re “going into all the world” (i.e., the grocery store, school, post office, restaurants, work), keep your Bible nearby (perhaps with the plan of salvation marked in it). Keep a few *Searching for Truth* DVDs in your purse. Keep a smile on your face. A sour look will close doors not open them!

Equip yourself by staying in the Word. One successful soul winner said his turning point was when he found himself unable to answer questions that came up. He started reading through the New Testament once every month. Now the Word saturates his mind. He said it amazes him how there always seem to be opportunities to discuss what he just read. “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Do you know someone who seems to be a natural at soul winning? Ask them if you can sit in on their next few studies. Not only will that fuel your passion and excitement, but it will also allow you to observe what has been effective for them.

### **Pray**

Pray for eyes that see the fields ripe unto harvest. Pray for passion. Pray for open doors. And then pray for the courage to make the most of those open doors and opportunities.

Pray before a study. We want God's help and that brings comfort (Heb. 4:16). Pray with the person you are studying with: you can pray something along the lines of, "Thank You for Your Word. Help us to see Your truths and accept them with an open heart." Have others pray for you. This will not only give you more confidence, but will also enable others to have a vested interest in the welfare of a soul. And if something comes up to prevent you from completing a study, you might have someone available to take your place who has already been praying for that person.

Paul urges Timothy to pray on behalf of all men. The reason Paul gives is that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth" (1 Tim. 2:1-4). In a class lecture covering this text, Denny Petrillo, president of the Bear Valley Bible Institute, said, "Prayer involves the Christian in the soul winning process. God desires the salvation of all mankind. When we pray it unites us with God. Our priorities are in harmony with His for all of mankind (John 3:16). Prayer connects us with God's plan. He wants us to be concerned for souls. God's agenda should be our agenda" (Petrillo).

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## There's A Great Day Coming

*Tish Clarke*



Tish Clarke hails from Southaven, Mississippi, and has been happily married to B.J. Clarke for 33 years. She has three children: Daniel, Holly, and Michael. Michael married Meagan Teske; he recently graduated from Memphis School of Preaching and is working with the Somerville church in Tennessee. Daniel and Holly are pursuing their own careers. Teaching has always been a passion for Tish and she's been blessed to speak at various lectureships, retreats, and marriage seminars with her husband, who preaches by appointment and serves as the director of the Memphis School of Preaching and Missions. She also instructs the student wives at Memphis School of Preaching about teaching in a church setting. She has taught English, reading, science, and social studies. Since receiving her degree in 2003, Tish has been with Hernando Middle School.

Will Thompson, the author and composer of this beautiful song, "There's a Great Day Coming," published many secular songs as well as gospel hymns. He authored "Jesus is All the World to Me" and "Lead Me Gently Home Father." Another one of his well-known songs, "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling," was used to close many gospel meetings in his day and is still widely used today. It is reported that Mr. Thompson was visiting D. L. Moody near the end of his life when Moody said to him, "Will, I would rather have written 'Softly and Tenderly' than anything I have been able to do my whole life." The theme of "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling" depicts Christ patiently and lovingly waiting at the door for His invitation to be heeded. An invitation, which accepted, would lead the redeemed sinner into His church, a resurrection with his Savior at the great day to come, and a life of eternal glory with the King of

kings. To accept or deny His invitation is the weightiest decision a man or woman will ever make in his or her lifetime. The undeniable fact is that *there is a great day coming*, and we must prepare for that day!

***There's A Great Day Coming***

There's a great day coming, a great day  
coming; There's a great day coming by and  
by, When the saints and the sinners shall  
be parted right and left, Are you ready for  
that day to come? (Thompson)

As Paul stood at Mars Hill and saw the numerous statues to the gods the Athenians worshipped, he boldly preached to them of the One God they had failed to respect and honor—the only true and divine God of the Bible. Guiding their attention to the mighty works of God he declared, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (KJV, Acts 17:30-31). Christ, the righteous Judge, will sit on His throne at the appointed day given by God, and will forever divide the sea of humanity. This will be a truly awesome day for some, and utterly terrifying for others. On that great day, the ruling that Christ delivers will never be altered. Judgment day will mark the end of Christ's invitation forevermore.

Those who follow Christ and are obedient to His Word have been promised a home prepared by Him to enter for eternity. “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” (John 14:2-3). Two assurances are given in these verses. First, Christ, at this very time, is preparing a home for each of His obedient followers in order to dwell in heaven with Him. Second, He has promised that He will come again. Assuredly, *there is a great day coming*.

Not long after this promise was given, Christ was crucified and rose again to walk for a time with His disciples on this earth before ascending to heaven. At the ascension, angels declared a glorious truth to the grieving witnesses who searched the heavens for Christ, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). It is as if the angels were reminding them of Christ’s promise. He is not gone for good but only for a season. A season, which is appointed by God, and then **He will return**. No more comforting words could be said to a grief-stricken man than that his loved one will return. Christ is coming back in the same manner that He left. We struggle for the words to say at a funeral to comfort the bereaved. To the Christian there are no greater words to be said. For when Christ returns, it will be to raise the believers from their deathly slumber and gather the living believers to Him in the sky. As difficult and tragic as it was for these witnesses of the ascension, they were given tremendous hope.

Mr. Thompson uses the phrase “there’s a great day coming by and by” to show that no man has the specifics of when that day will actually come. Many throughout the ages have seized upon some “divine intercession” or “mysterious calculations” in which they claim to know that Christ will return on a set date. History has proved each wrong time and time again. Christ taught His disciples that even He did not

know the date of His return, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Mat. 24:36). These charlatans are claiming to know more than the Son of God! Christ continued to speak to His disciples about this great day when He warned them to, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Mat. 24:42).

On that day, there will be a great division, *when the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left*. Jesus spoke of this parting in Matthew 25:31-33, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” What determines whether you or I will be a sheep or a goat? Christ explains the criteria for this division in the remaining verses of the chapter. In order to be a blessed sheep of Christ, and inherit the kingdom prepared by Him, a person must, in part, be filled with compassion for the Lord:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I

say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Mat. 25:35-40)

Christ preached at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). James declared that we must be “doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jam. 1:22) and “that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24). Peter spoke of our obedience to God through baptism, which guarantees us a resurrection with Christ and an inheritance that fades not away (1 Pet. 1:2-4). Furthermore, Peter taught we are to be set apart from the sinful world, “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 Pet. 1:14-16). To be in Christ’s sheepfold, we are to be compassionate to all men, continually do God’s will, obey in all things, and be holy as He is holy.

On that great day, there will be many who are declared to be goats, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Why were they parted from the others?

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a

stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. (Mat. 25:42-45)

Peter had much to say about the ungodly of this world. He spoke of the false prophets and teachers who would have swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:2). These men were filled with immoral lusts, like the world in Noah's day, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the wicked that surrounded Lot, all of which were condemned to punishment (2 Pet. 2:5-8). He spoke of the self-willed and those that were entangled again in a world of corruption (2 Pet. 2:10-22). Their deceptions and vain empty teachings were compared to, "wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever" (2 Pet. 2:17). John distinguished between those who would overcome and those who would not: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:7-8). Christ finished his teaching in Matthew 25:46 with these words, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

However, the Parable of the Talents teaches that it is not just about sin in our lives which will damn us but what we do with our Christian walk (Mat. 25:14-30). In this kingdom parable, we learn that within the church we must strive to do right or we can be parted from it. It is not enough simply to be a member. The first two servants were each given a bag of talents, or money, to protect and grow for their master. To one

was given five talents and to another two talents. They each doubled their money and the master was pleased as he commended them both with the same words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mat. 25:21, 23). Notice that neither of these servants declared their master to be a hard man who required more from his servants than was possible to give.

However, the words of the servant who received the one talent were harsh towards the master, “Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine” (Mat. 25:24-25). This servant lied about his master’s nature. How do we know this? It is clear the master is equivalent to Christ. Christ does not require more than is possible to do or give to Him. He is fair and honorable in His dealings with His people. However, to the man who was given one talent, the master had severe words for him, “Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury...And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 25:26-27, 30). The master is not agreeing with the servant that he was hard and reaped where he sowed not. He was simply stating that if the servant had truly believed that about him, would he not have worked harder to make a profit from the money for the master? This parable teaches us that it matters what we do with our lives. We can walk through this world in

purity and as sinless a state as possible after we become Christians; yet if we do nothing good for Christ, we are lost. It matters what we do with our Christian walk. We have to do right things and not just avoid wrong things. On that great day, to be parted right means to enter; to be parted left means to depart.

On a side note, the master judged each man separately on his ability and effort. They were not judged as a group. Being a part of the correct church will not grant you automatically a parting on the right side. You may be the only goat in that congregation, but you will be parted from it. My husband frequently preaches that we do not get in on the group plan.

The first verse ends with the line, *Are you ready for that day to come?* This line is made up of eight little words that carry a wealth of meaning to each of us. We often sing it without really thinking about what we are saying. We need to pause and ask, "Am I ready?" The Parable of the Ten Virgins comes to mind when thinking about being ready (Mat. 25:1-10). Five of the ten virgins were prepared and entered in with joy, and five were heartbroken to discover that they were not ready for the arrival of the bridegroom.

Culturally, in the first century, you were not allowed on the streets after dark without a lit lamp. This is a fact of which each one of these women would have been aware. None could say, "I had no idea," or "No one told me." Also, it was typical that the bridegroom came from his house to the bride's home in the evening to gather her friends and family and take them back to his home for the actual wedding. Since this was a common practice, each of these women should have been prepared for the reality that they would need oil in their lamps. There was no excuse.

Even today, we have certain expectations concerning a



wedding. Weddings can be elaborate and cost a lot of money or simple and planned on a frugal budget. Either way, the bride will plan to wear a beautiful dress and expect her bridesmaids to dress in something she approved for her special day. For half of them to come without the dress, shoes, jewelry, styled hair, or bouquet would be an insult to the bride and groom. Half of the bridesmaids could not take part in the ceremony. Imagine the disrespect and probable tears on the part of the bride! What groom would be happy to see his bride's big day ruined by her supposed friends?

Christ is very clear about the actions of the virgins for He called some wise and some foolish. It is important to point out that the bride and groom knew these women. They were friends. They were not strangers. It was typical then, as it is today, that planning and communication would take place from the bride and groom to any in the party. They knew what was expected of them, their roles, and the requirements for fulfilling their roles. Just as it would be too late for a bridesmaid today to find a missing dress on the wedding day, it was too late for the foolish virgins to take care of something so important as having oil for their lamps at the last minute. The bridegroom came while they were out trying to find oil, he invited the five wise virgins into the wedding, and the door was shut.

There are several applications from this parable. These women knew what was required of them to enter into the wedding. Christians know what is required of them to enter into the kingdom on that great day. They must remain faithful and obedient to their Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). Preparation involves working out your own responsibility to seek salvation. No one can be saved for you (Phi. 2:12; Acts 13:25-27; 2 Pet. 1:10). Preparation involves diligence and actively seeking to remain in a right relationship with Christ

(Heb. 10:26; John 15:6; Luke 9:62; 1 Tim. 4:1). Laziness is a choice that will condemn your soul (1 Tim. 5:8). Foolish and unprepared people can beg and plead, but the Lord's answer will be the same, "Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Mat. 25:11-12). Only the prepared will enter, "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut" (Mat. 25:10). Literally, the door was shut, never to be opened again for that occasion. There was no hope for anyone on the outside.

Finally, since no man knows the day the Lord will return, it is imperative that we be ready, "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mat. 25:13). Only the Father knows when that day will be. In the Parable of the Fig Tree (Mat. 24:32-34), Jesus taught that the destruction of Jerusalem would have signs that would happen in the lifetime of those hearing His words. However, "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Mat. 24:36-39). Jesus is clear that we must be ready, for *there is a great day to come* and no man knows the date or hour.

### ***There's A Bright Day Coming***

There's a bright day coming, a bright day coming; There's a bright day coming by and by. But its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord. Are you ready

for that day to come? (Thompson)

If we could bottle all the light present since the creation of the world from past and present stars, the ethereal glowing from the universe, and even manmade light, nothing would compare to the glory and brightness of Jesus' return on that great day. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, we discussed the glory of a wedding and its expectations for the bridesmaids. Weddings are notoriously filled with light—either from candles, electrical sconces, or just the simple glowing essence of the bride—everyone present is awash in the joy and brilliance of that event. Yet, even this bright day is dimmed in comparison to the brightness of the coming of the Lord.

Paul commends the Thessalonians for their patience, faith, and endurance through tribulation. He reminds them what will happen when the Lord returns:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (2 The. 1:7-10)

Imagine the scene Paul describes at that last day. The brightness of Christ will be revealed to mankind and His

judgment against the wicked will burn bright in the fire of His wrath.

He continues in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 to exhort them, "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." He gives us a small glimpse into the true brightness of Christ on the day described in verses 8-10, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 The. 2:8-10). Paul predicted that His brightness would destroy the wicked!

We see Christ's brightness revealed at His transfiguration, "and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Mat. 17:2). Hebrews 1:1-3 states that Christ is the brightness of God's glory. Imagine His brightness that will be revealed at His second coming! We see a picture of the glory and brightness of heaven, due to the light of Christ, in Revelation 21:23-25, "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there." We who are ruled by electric lamps and power generated from man cannot grasp the power of a light that will illuminate all of heaven. It is too amazing and beyond our capability to understand. Yet, John was given a glimpse into this scene. Christ's light will brighten every corner in heaven!

But His brightness will only be seen by those who run and finish the Christian race, “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). James declares, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12). John explains what true love involves, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The prince of this world is desperately trying to thwart our race and prevent us from receiving the crown James wrote about in his epistle. If we keep our eye on the picture John painted of heaven, we will run towards His brightness on that great day, and ultimately His light revealed in heaven.

Too many believe that abiding by the rules or “keeping His commandments” is tedious and equal to a prison sentence. This is a lie told by Satan. For in reality, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). Darkness covers and hides sin and danger. Light reveals truth and understanding. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psa. 119:130). Christ is the Word (John 1:1, 14). He declared, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12). The Word is the light of the world. He promised, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). As His words will never pass away, His light is in the world (Mat.

24:35). John was blessed with a glimpse into heaven on the Isle of Patmos. In Revelation 1:12-18 he tried with words of this earth to describe the majesty of the Son of God. He compared the Lord's face to the sun in verse 16, "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." His glory and brightness will be revealed to the entire population of earth at His second coming. For some it will be terrifying, for they will not be ready. For the few who walked the narrow path (Mat. 7:13-14), His brightness will be the light of heaven (Rev. 21:23-25).

***There's A Sad Day Coming***

There's a sad day coming, a sad day coming;  
There's a sad day coming by and by, When  
the sinner shall hear his doom: "Depart, I  
know you not!" Are you ready for that day  
to come? (Thompson)

Ultimately there are two categories of people who will be lost: those who never obey God's Word, and those who obey but fall away. There are those who will choose to never obey God's Word and remain in a lost state. Thousands were blessed to listen to the words of Christ during His short ministry on this earth; however, when the message became something they no longer wanted to hear, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Jesus told the rich young ruler what he needed to do to be saved, yet, when he couldn't bear to part with his riches, he "went away grieved" (Mark 10:17-22). Untold millions will choose the broad way because of enticements and ease, but they will be lost (Mat. 7:12-14). "And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is

fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:61-62). It is not enough to hear and not follow through with commitment. There are some who think they do God's bidding but do not follow His Word. Christ declares, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23). It is essential to be found in the one true church and follow God's law, not man's.

A second category of the lost is made up of those who have obeyed the truth but turned back to the world. Peter knew firsthand the anguish of someone who had turned away from His Lord. He denied he knew Him three times. When the cock crowed, "he went out and wept bitterly" (Mat. 26:75). His heart was pricked causing him to repent with bitter tears. For the Christian who takes his eye off His Master, he is once again drowning in the depths of sin just as Peter found himself at the mercy of the sea when he turned from His Savior (Mat. 14:30). He desired that no one would feel the deep despair he did, so he painted a vivid picture of the true nature of those who turn back, "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:21-22).

Within this category of the lost are the many members of the church who simply exist and do nothing. They do not work, teach, or show fruits of obedience. They are the bad fish found in the Parable of the Nets, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the

just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat. 13:47-50). This is a kingdom parable and as such applies to the church of which Christ died. There will be a great parting within the church. We must find ourselves ready and faithful within its divine walls. Remember, we don't get in on the group plan!

Seven times in the Gospels Jesus taught “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” when these lost souls are cast into outer darkness (Mat. 8:12; Mat. 13:42; Mat. 13:50; Mat. 22:13; Mat. 24:51; Mat. 25:30; Luke 13:28). Paul spoke of those who would be condemned for not believing the truth of God's Word (2 The. 2:12, Rom. 2:5, 8) and those who are filled with evil deeds (Col. 3:6). For those who reject Christ, His second coming will bring true hopelessness, pain, and agony (2 The. 1:7-10). All of this could have been avoided if the sinner possessed a true and honest heart that chose to follow the King. With the seriousness of this verse, Mr. Thompson writes once again, “Are you ready for that day to come?”

### ***Are You Ready?***

Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready for the judgment day? Are you ready? Are you ready? For the judgment day? (Thompson)

There are few wiser words written than the Psalmist's who declared, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa. 90:12). Our days are truly short and fade away as a vapor (Jam. 4:14) leaving us little time to attain wisdom if we squander the time given us. Considering no man knows when the great day of the Lord is coming, each person needs to take this verse to heart for his soul's sake. How do we apply our hearts unto wisdom? We



must go to His Word. Psalm 119:130 teaches, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” John taught that we would be sanctified (or made holy) through His Word, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17).

The first truth that is essential for wisdom is what it takes to be saved. It is clear that I need to know that God sent His Son, Jesus, the only begotten Son (John 3:16, 1 John 4:10). He shed His blood that I might be saved (Eph. 1:7, 1 Pet. 1:19). The Holy Spirit has revealed all truth through the Word contained in the pages of the Bible (John 16:13). I must hear the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 10:13, John 6:44-45). It is essential that I believe Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24, Heb. 11:6). I must repent of my sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30). I then confess that Jesus is the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). Showing my belief, I am baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16, 1 Pet. 3:21). Finally, I am to live faithfully (Col. 1:21, Rev. 2:10).

Once we have become faithful members of His kingdom, we are required to set ourselves apart from the world and walk as Christ walked. John taught many wonderful truths about Christ which we need to emulate in our walk. First, he stated in John 5:17, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” The Christian life should be about obedient work just as Christ exhibited an obedient mindset. Even when the will of His Father placed His foot on Golgotha’s road, He obediently walked that path. John reminds us that it is not enough to just say we are His. Our very lives should shine forth the face and mindset of our Savior. He walked in such a way that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father (John 14:9).

We must walk as He walked, obediently until the end of our days. Sometimes our path will be difficult, but we need to remember there is a day coming in which it will all be

worth it if we stay faithful. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). On that great day, if we are found faithful, John writes, “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). He reminds us to stay out of the world and the dangers of getting too close to it, “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” (1 John 2:15). We must learn to walk in the path of Christ.

Paul had much to say about living faithfully, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). To the Colossians, Paul stressed the need to be fruitful, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:10-11). Not only are we to emulate Christ, but we must produce the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23). In Romans 12:2 he declared, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” He begged the Ephesians to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). He continued teaching the Ephesians to, “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God

for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). In Galatians 6:1-3, he taught that we were to restore the wayward Christians back into the fold.

Peter stressed the attitude a Christian should possess: "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:5-8). James taught control of our tongues (Jam. 1:26). Matthew taught the need for forgiveness (Mat. 6:15). There is much to occupy our days walking this great path. However, none of this is difficult and impossible to do. Walking in the path of the Savior, and the message the Spirit revealed through the apostles about daily living, actually makes our lives better and worth the living!

Knowing that *there is a great day coming*, we have an obligation to reach out to a lost and dying world:

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be

ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:32-36)

What greater mercy could we do for a hopeless world than to bring it to the foot of the cross? Without access to His blood, mankind is lost for it is only a faithful Christian who will hear, “enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat. 25:21, 23).

### **In Conclusion**

Why is there even a bright day coming? First there was a sad day—the cruel cross of Christ—but this sadness led to a glorious brightness—His resurrection. Luke is clear that the great day is coming, “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (Acts 17:31-32). John records these beautiful words of Jesus to a grieving Martha in chapter 11:25-26, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” Christ came to seek and save that which was lost and dying in sin (Luke 19:10).

Paul spoke of Christ's glorious resurrection and revealed what His rising means for each of us, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:8-11). He further declared that death had lost

its power, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:55-58).

While God lingers, there is time to study and get our lives right—but for how long? No man knows the time or the hour. Am I ready? Are you ready for that day to come?

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## The Old Rugged Cross

*Michele Teske*



Michele Teske was born in Winnfield, Louisiana, and was raised in Montgomery, Louisiana, where her father served as the preacher for nineteen years. Michele is married to her high school sweetheart, Mark, who currently serves as the director of operations at the *Gospel Broadcasting Network*. Together they have six children ranging in ages from fifteen to twenty-six. After graduating from the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and Arts, Michele continued her studies at the University of New Orleans, where she earned a B.S. in Psychology. Michele taught Bible at Ganus Christian School in New Orleans. She has served as the coordinator for the wives program at the Brown Trail School of Preaching and also as one of the instructors for the weekly ladies Bible study. Michele has spoken at various events in Louisiana, Alabama, Texas, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Africa. Currently, she teaches classes at Southaven and helps to coordinate the young children's classes.

### Introduction

The hymn “The Old Rugged Cross” was written in 1912 by George Bennard. He was a traveling minister for the Salvation Army throughout the Midwest. While preaching in one of his meetings in Michigan, some young people began to trouble him. He was bothered by their disrespect of the Gospel and began thinking of Christ and the cross. His reflections are what inspired this song which took many months to complete. This song was first led in a worship service on June 7, 1913 (Wyse). His hymn has become a favorite song sung by Christians on a weekly basis throughout the decades since (Terry).

The song begins with the words, “**On a hill far away**” (Bennard). Truly, in terms of time and distance, the

events of that day are far removed from us today. According to Google maps, modern-day Israel is approximately 6,632 miles away from Southaven, Mississippi. And in terms of time, we are separated from the events of the crucifixion by almost two thousand years. Yet, something so distant has such an amazing impact on my life today and on my eternal life.

The cross is the pivotal point of all human history. The past, present, and future have as their center the cross of Christ. The gospel is God's power to save, but without the cross there is no gospel. Remove the cross, and you have destroyed all joy in birth, purpose in life, and hope in death. Erase the cross, and everyday [sic] of life is one unending tragedy. With the cross everything matters; without the cross nothing matters. (Chesser 74)

### **The Shame of The Cross**

George Bennard called the cross, **“the emblem of suffering and shame”** and indeed it was. It is believed that crucifixion first began with the Persians. Both the Greeks and the Romans carried it into their cultures. By the time of Jesus' death, the Romans had well perfected this mode of torture.

Though the procedure was subject to wide variation according to the whim and sadism of the executioner, by the Roman period several features were fairly standard. With a placard proclaiming the crime hung around the neck, the condemned prisoner carried the crossbar,



not the whole cross, to the place of execution where the upright stake was already in place. There the offender was stripped and flogged. The prisoner's arms were affixed to the crossbar with ropes or nails, and the crossbar was then raised and attached to the upright stake. A small wooden block attached to the stake beneath the buttocks supported the weight of the suspended body, which was bound to the stake with ropes. Often the feet were also affixed to the stake with ropes or nails. Because deterrence was a primary objective, the cross was always erected in a public place. Death came slowly, often only after several days, and resulted from the cumulative impact of thirst, hunger, exhaustion, exposure, and the traumatic effects of the scourging. After death the body was usually left hanging on the cross. Because of the protracted suffering and the extreme ignominy of this manner of execution, it was viewed by the Romans as the supreme penalty, the 'most wretched of deaths' (Josephus), and generally reserved for the lowest classes and the most heinous crimes. (Achte-meier 194)

Notice that not only was the cross a violent and painful way to die, but it was also reserved for those who had committed the most horrific crimes and for those of low class. Yet the Creator of the universe allowed Himself to come to this earth, live a humble and difficult life, and then face the most horrific death ever invented. He died the death of a

common criminal on a cross, not because of anything He had done wrong, but because of me and my sins. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that He despised its shame. “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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (NKJV, Heb. 12:2). Paul also reminds us in the book of Philippians that Jesus was willing to subject Himself to the shameful cross. “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. 2:7-8).

Although the cross has such a shameful and violent history, I have a glorious and peaceful future because of the cross. As Bennard so eloquently stated in his song, “**O, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, has a wondrous attraction for me.**”

### **The Glory of the Cross**

With such a shameful history, why would the Christian glory in the cross? Paul says in Galatians 6:14, “But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The cross was the only thing that Paul counted as worthy of something in which to glory. We know that our sins have put a barrier between us and our God (Isa. 59:2). It is only through the cross that we are able to be reconciled back to our God (Eph. 2:14-16). Not only are we reconciled to God, but we are also reconciled to one another. There is no longer a wall between those who follow the law and those who do not. We are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). What a glorious reconciliation of man-to-man and man-to-God—all because of the cross!

To fully grasp our reconciliation, let us look at our

separation. Throughout the Bible we are confronted with man's sin problem. In Genesis 3, we read of Satan's deception of Eve. In Exodus through Deuteronomy, we read of the faithlessness of the children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. We later learn of David (a man after God's own heart), his adultery with Bathsheba, and later his plan of murder to cover it. Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, was led away into sin by his wives. Peter, one of Jesus' closest earthly friends, even denied that he knew Jesus—not once but three times. And what about me? Of what sins am I guilty? Do I lie? Am I disrespectful to the authority God has placed in the church or in the home? Do I harbor envy in my heart? Do I gossip? Am I ungrateful? The truth is it does not matter which sin I choose to allow in my life because **all** sin separates me from my God.

But God, from the beginning of time, set up a plan to reconcile me back to Him! And the cross was a pivotal part of that plan. Because of the distance my sin has taken me from my God, without the cross, there is no amount of good deeds that I can do to reconcile myself back to God. "But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (ASV, Gal. 6:14). Boasting about any accomplishment, award, or good deed of mine is of no avail, these things will never bring about my salvation. I cannot do anything apart from Christ to bring about my salvation. Additionally, there are no wise words of man that have the power to save me either. Only the cross of Christ has the power to do that! "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

### **The Price of the Cross**

**"And I love that old cross, where the dearest and**

**best, for a world of lost sinners was slain”** (Bennard). Do I fully understand the price that was paid for me? Under the old covenant, the sinner literally came face to face with his sin offering. He was to take his sacrifice to the tabernacle or temple and kill it himself. The struggle of the animal as it attempted to free itself from this dreadful end, as well as the blood, would serve as visual reminders of the high price that sin had. While we do not physically come in contact with our sacrifice, we are given a reminder on a weekly basis of the high price that was paid for our pardon. We should be sober minded and reflective as we partake of this memorial every week. What an incredible act of love was demonstrated on that cross. I should keep these scenes ever before my mind’s eye as a reminder of the price that was paid for my sin. The cross is payment in full for a debt that was owed by me. I want to paint a picture of that cost for you by bringing together the events leading up to and culminating in the crucifixion of our Savior.

On Thursday night, after Jesus has eaten with His disciples, He and His disciples, with the exception of Judas, went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went a little farther into the garden to pray. In an attempt to prepare them for the events that lay ahead of them that evening and over the course of the next few days, Jesus asked that they watch with Him and “pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40). Jesus went off by Himself and began to pray. In His prayer, Jesus prayed, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus prayed with such earnestness that He sweat drops of blood. It was probably what we know of today as hematidrosis. “Hematidrosis is an extremely rare condition in which you sweat blood. Hematidrosis generally happens

when a person feels intense fear or stress” (Higuera). “While the extent of blood loss generally is minimal, hematidrosis also results in the skin becoming extremely tender and fragile” (Thompson and Harrub). This would have made the beatings he received later even more painful and difficult to bear. While Jesus prayed, an angel came from heaven to strengthen Him.

Several times He returned to Peter, James, and John and found them sleeping. Jesus asked, “Could you not watch one hour?” (Mark 14:37). Apparently they could not, because upon His return to them each time He found them sleeping. Apparently the grief that they felt was so unbearable that they fell asleep from sorrow (Luke 22:45). Jesus had tried to prepare them. He had told them of events that would transpire that night. He told them to stay there and pray. So, while they too were in agony, they turned to sleep instead of prayer. Sorrow kept these men from Jesus at a time when Jesus needed them the most, and it kept them from prayer when they needed it the most. We must be wary lest we too let things of this life tire us out or wear us down so that we lose our opportunities to be strengthened or to serve in the kingdom.

A few hours before dawn, on Friday morning, when Jesus finished praying, He returned to His disciples and spoke to them, once again awakening them from their sleep. Immediately, Judas and his band came upon Jesus and His disciples. Judas, as was his sign, walked up to Jesus and kissed Him. Although it was a common greeting during this time, on this day it was betrayal of the worst kind. It was the sign that Judas gave to those who were with him to arrest Jesus. Jesus knew what was happening and asked the men whom they were seeking. When they responded, “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 18:5) Jesus answered “*ego eimi*” or “I am”

(John 18:5). While He had in reality acknowledged that He was the one for whom they were looking, He also, by that statement, reminded them that He was God (see also Exo. 3:13-14). Upon His statement, the men who came with the intention of arresting Jesus fell down to the ground. Twice Jesus answered in this manner and the third time Jesus further asked that they arrest Him and let those who were with Him go. Peter, in an effort to save Jesus from being arrested, took out his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of a high priest. Jesus then healed Malchus' ear and asked Peter to put away his sword.

The soldiers bound Jesus and led Him to Annas. Annas asked Jesus about His disciples and His teachings. Jesus reminded Annas that everything He had taught was said in public places. Annas could have asked the ones who had heard the teachings of Jesus about what He had said. Upon hearing this one of the officers slapped Jesus and then our Savior was led away to Caiaphas. This is when council sought the testimony of false witnesses in order to charge Jesus with a chargeable crime. Many witnesses came to testify, but they could never actually agree on a charge. Finally, two came close to a charge that would stick, but in reality, even these witnesses did not agree in their testimony. According to Num. 35:30, Jesus could not be put to death, because they could not find more than one witness to agree on a charge against Him. Caiaphas then ordered that Jesus answer the charges that had been made against Him, but Jesus remained silent. Finally, Caiaphas ordered Jesus to tell him if He was "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mat. 26:63). When Jesus answered that it was as he (Caiaphas) had said, Caiaphas was then ready to charge Jesus with blasphemy. "We have heard it ourselves from His own mouth" (Luke 22:71). "In this case, no witnesses were called at all. The chief priest improperly assumed the judges

themselves could serve as witnesses to an alleged crime they were currently judging” (Foreman 117).

Jesus was blindfolded by the mob; they spat in His face, beat Him, and hit him with their hands, asking that He prophecy as to who struck Him. To add to the humiliation of the events, Peter was within the very view of our Lord as he cursed and swore that he did not know or have any association with Jesus. What added pain must have been felt by our Lord as one of His closest associates denied Him. Remember how Peter had insisted that he would **never** deny Jesus? We too must be careful that we may not become proud in regards to our Christianity. We can fall! “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

When morning finally came, the chief priest and elders had decided that they wanted to put Jesus to death. They, once again, bound Him and brought Him to Pilate. Although Pilate would have preferred that the Jews handle this matter themselves, he asked them for a charge. They told him that Jesus had been, “perverting the nation” (disturbing the peace), forbidding people to pay taxes to Caesar, and proclaiming that He was a king (Luke 23:2). So Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. Jesus asked Pilate why he asked (for himself or for someone else?). He again questioned Jesus, asking Jesus what He had done. Jesus admitted that He was a king, however, He added that it was not an earthly kingdom when He said, “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” (John 18:36). Because of this, Pilate did not feel that Jesus really was guilty of any of the charges that had been made against Him.

When Pilate told the crowd that he found no reason to punish Jesus, they urgently insisted that Jesus was stirring up

trouble in Galilee. After learning that Jesus belonged to the jurisdiction of Herod, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Herod wanted to see Jesus for some time because he wanted to see a miracle. Herod asked Jesus lots of questions, while the scribes and the chief priests made many accusations against Jesus. However, Jesus did no miracle or made any response to Herod. Herod and his soldiers mistreated Jesus, mocked Him, put a beautiful robe on Him, and sent Him back to Pilate.

Neither Pilate nor Herod found any crime of which to charge Jesus, so Pilate asked the Jews to allow him to punish and release Jesus instead of sentencing Him to death. The crowd however, was not willing to allow this to happen and asked that a criminal named Barabbas be released instead. Ironically, Barabbas was a revolutionist, or someone who would have been guilty of disturbing the peace. Additionally, he had been guilty of murder. Pilate's wife had warned Pilate that Jesus was a righteous man, but Pilate was not able to dissuade the crowd. The crowd then accused Pilate of not being loyal to Caesar because in declaring Himself a king, Jesus had opposed Caesar. By releasing Jesus Pilate would then be opposing Caesar. Fearing for his job, he gave in to their request and brought Jesus out to them, saying, "Behold your King" (John 19:14). The soldiers then took Jesus and scourged Him. Remember that while praying, Jesus had sweat drops of blood so His skin was tender. What pain Jesus was called to bear, even before He was placed on the cross!

After being scourged, Jesus was brought into the Roman barracks, dressed in a scarlet robe, given a crown made of thorns, and a reed. He was mocked, spit on, and struck on the head. The soldiers then took the purple robe off of Jesus' open, bleeding back and put His own clothes back on Him. Because of His weakened state at this point, a man named Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha.



Jesus was offered a wine and gall mixture that was given to victims in order to help relieve some of the pain. Yet, when Jesus tasted it, He refused to drink. The soldiers then took His clothing and hung Him upon the cross. A sign was placed over Him with the charge, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Mat. 27:37).

As if the shame of being nailed to a cross was not enough (Deu. 21:22-23), Jesus was mocked by the soldiers, the thief on the cross beside Him, the scribes, chief priests and elders, as well as passersby, yet Jesus uttered some of the most amazing words ever spoken, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). There were not just mockers at the cross: some of the women who had followed Jesus, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John came to be with Him. When Jesus saw that His mother and John were there, “He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘behold your mother!’” (John 19:26-27). The agony of the cross continued for six hours. During that time, one of the thieves came to his senses and asked that Jesus remember him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus kindly answered him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). After some time, Jesus became thirsty and cried out, “I thirst” (John 19:28). He was given sour wine on hyssop.

As Jesus hung there on His cross, suspended between heaven and earth, He cried out to His Father, “My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34). In his article, “The Haunting Question from the Cross,” Wayne Jackson states this,

In what way did God “forsake” his Son?  
Perhaps this: he **allowed** him to die, to  
drink the full measure of suffering upon  
the cross, in order that humanity might

have a sacrificial offering for sin. Could the Father have intervened and rescued Christ from the cross? Surely so; but then all of mankind would have been forever lost. Because of his love for us, therefore, he abandoned his Son to the fate of Calvary.

This poses a question for the astute Bible student. How did the Son of God, who even knew the thoughts of people without them uttering a word (Mark 2:6-8), not know why His Father had, in a sense, forsaken Him? Jackson goes on in his article to pose this possibility,

I said all of that to suggest this: since the Lord knows that we frequently suffer without fully comprehending exactly why, is it not possible that in his identification with us as our merciful and faithful high priest (cf. Heb. 2:17-18), he also might have chosen to briefly veil his heavenly vision and thereby share with us in the mystery of human anguish? Don't we frequently suffer and wonder, "Why?" Could this be but another example of his gracious love?

While, of course, we cannot be dogmatic on this, the possibility is there. When we are struggling with the "why" of life around us, we must continue to endure like Jesus did, knowing that God, in His infinite wisdom and infinite love for us can help us endure even the worst of situations.

Two more sayings of Jesus are recorded for us in the Gospel Books. Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30) and

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). After these statements, Jesus died. This was the price that was paid for your sins and for mine! What a great cost and with what love that price was paid.

### **The Calling of the Cross**

**“To that old rugged cross, I will ever be true, Its shame and reproach gladly bear”** (Bennard). “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, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2). We must have endurance! We must not quit!

Jesus bore the cross that was able to provide for our salvation, we too are called to bear a cross. In Matthew 10:38; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:23; and Luke 14:27, we are told that we must bear our cross. Remember that a cross is an instrument of pain and death. While the Christian life is definitely worthwhile, we should not expect that it will always be pleasant. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Do you see that small, yet important word **“all”**? While the cross that we bear will never be as difficult as the one that Jesus was called to bear, it will be difficult.

So like Jesus, who endured His cross for the joy of bringing about my salvation, let me consider the joy that is before me (eternity in Heaven with God) and patiently endure the cross that I am called to bear, faithful until the end. Because of the cross of Jesus, I look forward to living with Him throughout eternity in heaven. **“So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down, I will**

**cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it someday for a crown”** (Bennard).

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