

The Politically Incorrect Church Of Christ



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Lectureship Director

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Preface

Political correctness is the idea that language and beliefs which could offend should be eliminated. Modern society has, however, been very biased in the application of this principle. Political correctness has been used to silence biblical truths and principles of morality, but at the same time as a powerful tool to further wickedness, such as homosexuality and the transgender movement. Proponents of this philosophy have labeled Bible believers as bigots and haters. The Devil has been very effective with this approach, as such labels have made many deny truths that they once firmly held. One is reminded of Peter in his denial of Jesus, lest he be labeled as one of His followers (Mat. 26:69-75).

It is for these reasons that the Southaven eldership has chosen this year's lectureship theme, The Politically Incorrect Church of Christ. A large number of the biblical truths, which for two thousand years have been taught and held by the Lord's church, are now considered offensive, unacceptable, and politically incorrect. But the Word of God does not change with political winds and the whims of society. Jesus said "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mat. 24:35). What is politically correct in society is constantly changing, but the Word of God never changes. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Great gratitude is expressed to each speaker who has put in countless hours studying, preparing and writing the content of this volume. Thanks is also expressed to the Southaven eldership who supports and funds the annual lectureship. We also express appreciation to all of the members of the Southaven church who work in various areas, many behind the scenes. Without their efforts, this lectureship would not be possible. A special note of appreciation is due this year to Robert Jefferies, and each of the elders, who due to my absence, took upon them extra work to get this book edited and published. Above all, thanks be to God, who is the never-changing standard. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

In Christ,
Don Blackwell
Lectureship Director, 2019

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Homosexuality Is Still Sin

Robert Jefferies



Robert Jefferies is a native of Memphis, TN. 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, TN where he served as minister for the Smyrna congregation from 2002-2007. Robert also taught Bible and coached high school basketball and baseball for Boyd Christian School. Since 2007 he has been serving as one of the ministers for the Southaven congregation in Southaven, MS.

Year after year, my love and affection continues to grow stronger and stronger for this congregation. Since its beginning, Southaven has been a beacon to the Mid-South area as well as to the brotherhood as a whole (Matthew 5:14-16). It has been this writer's honor and privilege to work on a daily basis and to serve as one of her evangelists for the past twelve years. Only the Lord knows how much good has been done as a result of the great works of this church.

In a world where there is so much focus on political correctness, this year's theme "*The Politically Incorrect Church Of Christ*" is one that is extremely relevant. Before we get started with our study, it is imperative that we understand exactly what is meant by the statement "politically correct." "The term political correctness (adjectivally: politically correct; commonly abbreviated PC) is used to describe language, policies, or measures

that are intended to avoid offense or disadvantage to members of particular groups in society. Since the late 1980s, the term has come to refer to avoiding language or behavior that can be seen as excluding, marginalizing, or insulting groups of people considered disadvantaged or discriminated against, especially groups defined by sex or race. In public discourse and the media, it is generally used as a pejorative, implying that these policies are excessive or unwarranted” (Wikipedia). It is unfortunate that so many of our political leaders today have cowered in fear of the masses. It is even more disheartening that it has made its way into the religious world, and has even begun to infiltrate the Lord’s church. I understand the need to be kind to others; however, we cannot compromise what the Word of God has to say. It does not matter if it is in the realm of science, doctrine, politics, or morals; God’s Word must be the standard. Instead of so many people worrying about being politically correct, we need to be focused on being Biblically correct.

For this study, we are going to focus our attention on a subject that has stirred a lot of controversy in the realm of politics over the last couple of decades. In addition to politics, many religious groups have changed their positions on this topic as well and refuse to call it a sin. Our subject for consideration is Homosexuality is still a sin.

When we think about homosexuality today, several thoughts are worthy of our consideration. According to one study, in the United States, 10.7 million identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (www2.census.gov). It is a subject that is not going away, as much as

we would like for it to happen. It is a subject that was once very much despised, rejected, and looked down upon in our country, but is now widely accepted and fully embraced. It was once kept in the closet, but now applauded to be public knowledge. Today, if a person admits to being gay it is looked at as a badge of honor. I can remember our former president applauding those who have come out of the closet. There have been numerous songs about it. One of the most popular in recent years was recorded in 2008 by Katy Perry entitled, "I Kissed A Girl & I Liked It." Growing up in the 1980-1990s, TV programs and movies rarely showed homosexuals. However, today, there are numerous TV shows that embrace homosexuality, and present it as normal behavior. In fact, it is almost difficult to find a program on night time TV without at least one homosexual couple or allusions to homosexuality. Unfortunately, young people today have grown up with homosexuality as something that is ordinary. This subject is very emotionally charged & if you speak out against it, it can be considered a hate crime. This writer has spoken with high school teachers who have witnessed teenage boys and girls kissing in the hallways and have asked them to separate. However, whenever they have seen couples kissing that were the same sex and said something to them, they were considered as being hateful towards them. If we are not careful, with Hollywood's continual influence, the push is to make homosexuality a non-issue in society. Is this a non-issue with God? That's what we want to determine in this study today. It's important for us to remember that we

are going to be judged by the words of His book one day. So, we better know what it says on this crucial subject.

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words,
hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have
spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day
(John 12:48).

His view on this subject, as well as any other subject is of utmost importance.

HOW DOES GOD VIEW HOMOSEXUALITY?

Although we are living in a day and age where many advocates have clouded our minds and consumed the issue, it is imperative that we understand, first and foremost, that God makes it crystal clear as to how He views the subject of homosexuality. The Bible leaves us no room for doubt. No matter what dispensation of time, no matter what section of the Bible we are reading, God's feelings on the subject remain consistent. The world may refer to homosexuality as love, but God views it completely different. As Christians, our challenge is to see things as God sees them, regardless of the pressures from the world. As the spokesman for God, Hosea wrote, "For I am God, and not man" (Hos. 11:9). God's messenger Isaiah wrote,

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither
are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as
the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my
ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts
than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Solomon warned, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"

(Pro. 14:12). Consider how God views homosexuality throughout each dispensation of history.

WHAT WAS GOD'S VIEW DURING THE PATRIARCHAL AGE?

He Viewed It As Wickedness. The first occurrence of homosexuality can actually be traced back to the first book of the Bible, to the book of Genesis, with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The residents of those two cities were committing numerous sins, but among those was the predominate sin of homosexuality.

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them (Gen. 19:1-5).

What is meant by the word "know" in Genesis 19:5? Consider how other translations have translated this word; The New American Standard translates it as

“to have relations.” The New King James says, “to know them carnally.” While the New International Version renders it as “to have sex with them.”

Notice how Lot describes this action. “And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, **do not so wickedly**” (Gen. 19:6-7). The Bible describes it as wickedness.

WHAT WAS GOD’S VIEW DURING THE MOSAIC AGE?

He Viewed It As An Abomination. “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: **it is abomination**” (Lev. 18:22). “The word ‘lie’ here means to have sexual relations with. Mankind means male-kind as opposed to human-kind. The New King James Version states, ‘You shall not lie with a male as with a woman.’” (Blackmore 466). In case He was not clear enough on His feelings about homosexuality, just two chapters later records these words during a discussion of several sexual sins,

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed **an abomination**: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev. 20:13).

Thayer’s defines abomination as “something that is disgusting, an abhorrance” (Thayer). Another source defines it this way, “a vile, shameful, or detestable action, condition, habit, etc” (Dictionary.com). One may recall that God views idols as an abomination as well (Deu. 7:24-25). In Proverbs 6:16-19, Solomon indicates seven things that are an abomination to God. Homosexuality falls into the category as all of these things that are

repulsive to God. In Leviticus 20, with all of the sexual sins mentioned, God did not recognize adultery, incest, bestiality, and homosexuality as acceptable lifestyles. In addition to this, God not only viewed homosexuality as a sin, it is so repulsive that it was a capital crime worthy of the death penalty.

In addition to these thoughts, there have been those that have more recently tried to down play the sin of homosexuality and have made the argument that Sodom was destroyed because of a lack of hospitality. Some will cite a passage from Ezekiel for their defense.

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy (Eze. 16:49).

While a lack of hospitality was part of the problem, it would be fitting to notice the next verse.

And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good (Eze. 16:50).

What is considered an abomination? Homosexuality (Lev. 20:13).

WHAT WAS GOD'S VIEW DURING THE CHRISTIAN AGE?

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul describes homosexuality in different ways, one of those is found in his first inspired letter to the Corinthians. **He views it as unrighteousness.** He reminds them that some had

been unrighteous. Literally, they had not been living right in the eyes of God.

Or do you not know that the **unrighteous** will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11 ESV).

Sexual immorality was so rampant in Corinth, that those in the first century would describe a person, or a group of individuals who had committed these sins, as being “Corinthianized.” Part of the sexual immorality involved homosexuality. Corinth was the “sin city” of the first century. Under the law of Moses, it warranted the death penalty. Under the new covenant, those who practice such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, he listed a laundry list of sins of which the Gentiles were guilty. In the midst of this list we read these words,

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

“Homosexuality was so rampant in the Roman world that fourteen of the first fifteen Roman emperors were professed homosexuals” (Barclay 25). In Paul’s list, there are a couple of things worthy of noting. First, he **described their affections as “vile.”** The word “vile” means, “indignity, disgrace, dishonor, shame” (Strong’s). In fact, the *New International Version* translates it as “shame.” Second, he uses phrases like “natural use” and “that which is against nature.” Use is a reference to sexual relations. They were gratifying their lusts in unnatural ways. The homosexual act is against nature. Third, he describes it as **“unseemly.”** The New King James translates this as “shameful.” Today, homosexuals talk about having gay pride when they should be ashamed of it. In addition to these thoughts, the Apostle Paul tells us that they “burned in their lust.” “Instead of controlling their desires (lusts), homosexuals allowed it to rage out of control” (Roper 70). Not only did they burn in their lust, they were in error. In essence, “they were not on the right path, but on the wrong path” (Roper 70).

The Apostle Peter sheds light on this subject as well. In Peter’s second inspired letter, he begins writing about the judgment of God. He reminds them of fallen angels, the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. As he writes to them about Sodom and Gomorrah, he describes homosexuality in four ways. He describes it as *ungodly, filthy, wicked, and unlawful*. Notice what he writes,

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah
into ashes condemned them with an overthrow,

making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) (2 Pet. 2:6-8).

In addition to the words of Peter and Paul, near the end of God's Word, we have another description of homosexuality found in the book of Jude that is a reference back to Sodom & Gomorrah. *The writer views it as fornication and strange flesh.* He takes our attention back to the book of Genesis,

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7 NKJV).

The English Standard Version translates "strange flesh" as "unnatural desire." This sounds very similar to what the Apostle Paul wrote to Rome. Fornication is "all unlawful sexual intercourse. This includes sex between a man and woman, homosexuality, adultery, and bestiality" (Connally 327).

One can read the Word of God from cover to cover, and easily conclude that God's feelings towards this subject have remained consistent throughout. It may be politically correct to condone homosexuality. However, if we are going to be Biblically correct, we must view it the way God does. He sees it as sin.

HOW HAVE SOME TRIED TO DEFEND HOMOSEXUALITY?

There are numerous people who have attempted to defend homosexuality. There are many that advocate that it's just an alternate lifestyle, but it is just as acceptable as any other lifestyle.

Some have tried to contend that homosexuality is a *birth defect or a disease*. Others have tried to argue that people are born gay. They believe that this "condition" is something that is hereditary or a result of genetics like brown hair or blue eyes passed on by our parents. Therefore, they cannot help being what they are. Friends, our society, media, and leaders of our nation have propagated this upon us for so long that some Christians are beginning to believe what they are saying. For years, psychiatrists, medical doctors, scientists, theologians, & others have studied and pondered these exact thoughts. However, there seems to be no real evidence to support these contentions. Consider the following research done by some renown doctors (Meadows 349-350):

There is no evidence of any genetic or hormonal causes for homosexuality." (Dr. Evans at the Neuro-psychiatric Institute of UCLA).

It appears not to be genetic or congenital and there is no correlation between body typology or endocrine development & homosexual behavior" (Dr. Tweedie, Professor of Psychology at Fuller Graduate school of Psychology).

Homosexuality is not innate or inborn but an acquired or learned process" (Dr. Socorides, MD

wrote in the magazine called Journal of American Medicine).

In a sermon Don Blackwell preached at Southaven on one occasion, he mentioned that identical twins have matching DNA and noted that a study was done that indicated only eleven percent of the time both siblings were homosexual. Which means it is not genetics, the science does not support it.

Second, some have tried to defend homosexuality by saying *Jesus never specifically condemned it*, so it must be acceptable. There are two things that we need to consider with this thought. First, Jesus spoke about the marriage relationship during His earthly ministry. On one occasion, he was asked about the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In the midst of that discussion, Jesus described the marriage relationship to be between a husband and a wife. Which meant a man and a woman. He would then speak about how this is how it was supposed to be from the beginning.

Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? (Gen. 19:4-5; cf. Gen. 2:18-25).

Jesus did speak about the marriage relationship, every other relationship is excluded from that plan. Second, when Jude wrote about homosexuality, he described it as fornication. What did Jesus say about fornication? “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man:

but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man” (Mat. 15:19-20). He said this is something that defiles a person. To defile means, “to make unclean” (Strong’s).

In essence, the real cause of homosexuality is still choice. Ultimately, every individual is responsible for their own behavior and the choices they make. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he wrote,

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:26-27).

When they left the “natural use” and engaged in another, they chose to do it.

We are living in a day and age where people want to blame genetics rather than taking responsibility for their choices. It is important to understand that it is a choice that one can leave.

WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THOSE WHO PRACTICE HOMOSEXUALITY?

As mentioned earlier in the manuscript, Jude tells us that it is fornication. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he wrote,

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,

nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

When Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, he informed them about the works of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The end result of those that practice these things, including homosexuality, will not be in Heaven. Hell will be the consequence. Many in our world would have us to believe that saying anything against homosexuality is a hate crime. Quite the contrary. If we are going to show love to them, we are going to speak the truth in love and show them what the Scriptures teach about homosexuality and continue to stand for what is right (Eph. 4:15)

WHAT IS THE CURE FOR HOMOSEXUALITY?

The cure for homosexuality is the same cure for every other sin. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom.6:23).

The Gospel is the cure. When Paul addressed the church at Corinth, he pointed out that they had been guilty of many different sins. One of which was homosexuality. But, notice something very important he mentioned about them.

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:11).

This is the way they were, not the way they are. They had turned from the sin of homosexuality. Any person who is involved and guilty of sin, can be washed, sanctified, and justified, including those who have been guilty of homosexuality.

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HOMOSEXUALITY IS STILL SIN

Strong, James. "Defile." Esword.

Strong, James. "Vile." Esword.

Thayer, Joseph. "Abomination."

Don't Shoot? The Christian And Self-Defense

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, SC. 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*.

This is a production of World Video Bible School - the manuscript was transcribed from a lesson presented by Don Blackwell - available in DVD format. To God be the glory.

INTRODUCTION

I enjoy shooting for recreational purposes. Taking the day and going to the gun range with my family and friends and shooting targets is a great deal of fun. Gun collecting

and hunting are hugely popular hobbies in our country. But what about using guns for self-defense? Now, that is a different question altogether. Does a Christian have the right to bear arms, to use a gun to protect himself and the lives of his family? What if it came to the point of taking the life of another human being in order to protect one's own family? Would a Christian be sinning if it came to that?

A few months ago, I ran across an article that a friend of mine had posted on Facebook. The story begins, three armed felons attempted to rob an off-duty police officer dressed in civilian clothes as he stood in front of a bank. The officer shot all three of these men, killing three armed robbers. But that is not the part that really got my attention. What got my attention was the comments that followed the article. One person was furious that the officer shot these men. She said that, "This is all the more reason for people not to carry guns. Three men lost their lives over a petty crime." Then someone else responded and said, "They were armed men, they got what they deserved." The comments grew angrier and more combative.

When we start talking about guns and self-defense, we are discussing a topic that stirs people's feelings, emotions and even tempers. We are going to try to avoid that in this study. Of course, this is a highly relevant and a very timely topic.

In the recent past we have had events in our country such as the shooting at Fort Hood, the gunman at the Batman movie in Colorado, the Sandy Hook shooting, where 20 children and 6 adults lost their lives. Then the President of the United States started talking about taking away guns, and Senator Dianne Feinstein proposed a bill

to do just that, and some very strong emotions were stirred in people, and a lot of questions were raised in people's minds. Christians started discussing the gun control issue.

As a side note, gun control is not the problem in our country. Some want to shift the blame. The problem has never been guns. In fact, let me ask you this question: What was the weapon that Cain used to kill Abel? I have always thought it was a stone. I do not know where I got that idea. I probably saw a picture of that when I was a child. A friend of mine said he had always envisioned it being a stick. But you know what? The Bible does not tell us. There is not a man alive who knows the answer to that question. Now, why is that significant? Because in this example of murder, the first of all murders, God did not even see fit to mention the weapon. But what He does talk about is personal responsibility. I am not here to talk about the intricacies of gun laws. There are good people who have differing views on that topic. The point I want to make is that we are missing the bigger picture of personal responsibility. All of these incidents have caused Christians to ask some very serious questions, like, for example: *"Can a Christian use deadly force to defend himself and his family?"* There are a lot of peripheral issues, such as, *"Can a Christian serve in the military?"* *"Can he defend his country in that way?"* *"Can a Christian be a policeman?"* *"Can a Christian be supportive of war?"*

Let's examine the subject of the Christian and self-defense. When it comes to self-defense and the defense of one's family, particularly with regard to the use of lethal force, brethren basically fall into two categories: **Number one**, you have those who feel that it is right and proper to defend one's family, even if it requires lethal force. **Number**

two, you have those that we would refer to as pacifists. They believe that it would be wrong for a Christian to ever use lethal force. I want to tell you right from the beginning that I am in the first category. I believe that it is right to protect one's self and particularly one's family. I believe that it is fine to serve in the military. I am former military myself. I have a concealed carry permit, as does my wife. If somebody says, "Well, you must not have studied this issue, because if you had studied the pacifist position, you would see that you are wrong. You would see that using lethal force violates Biblical principles." Actually, I have studied this in detail. I have read the arguments. I have read what I think is the best ones that have been made, but I believe that they are wrong. Now, I know there are good brethren who believe that it would be wrong, sinful to take the life of another person even in self-defense. Some of these are people that I love and highly regard. But I come to a different conclusion when I read the scriptures. Friends, I feel rather strongly about this. I believe that it is not only proper to defend one's self and particularly one's own family, I believe it is an obligation that I have as a man.

First, I want to share with you why I believe the Bible teaches that a Christian may practice self-defense; then I want to share with you the pacifist position and talk about some of the arguments they make; and finally I want to discuss some implications.

Point number one, why I believe that a Christian has the right to self-defense even if it involves lethal force. Number one, Jesus told His disciples to carry swords. In Luke 22:35-38, the Bible says this: Jesus said to them, "When I sent you without a money bag, knapsack, and

sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” Then He said to them, “But now he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.” So they said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” And He said unto them, “It is enough.”

First, I want you to notice that Jesus suggested that His disciples buy a sword. The sword was an instrument of death. It was a tool of injury. And they responded, “Lord, we have two swords.” He said, “It is enough.” You see, they were not going out to invade anyone, or two swords would not have been sufficient. Then why were they told to take a sword? And the answer is self-defense. That is why two swords were going to be enough. They were going to be traveling in some very dangerous areas where there would be evil men who would hurt them and leave them for dead.

You read the account of the good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10 and you see what happened to that individual, and the disciples would be traveling these same roads. I think it is also worthy to note that later, when they came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter had a sword. And the Lord tells Peter to put it in its place. He does not say, “Get rid of your sword.” He says, “Put your sword in its place.” You see, the Lord’s spiritual kingdom was never to be advanced by the sword.

Christianity is a spiritual fight, not a physical one (Ephesians 6:12). “We wrestle not against flesh and blood.” The sword has an appropriate place as a carnal weapon, a weapon of defense, but not as a religious one in the spiritual battle.

Reason number two why I believe that a Christian has the right in self-defense even if it involves lethal

force is because of the responsibility that a man has to his family.

In 1 Timothy 5:8 the Bible says,

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Now, in the context, Paul is talking about widows and is discussing the fact that a man has an obligation to provide care for those in his family. If a man will not do that, he is worse than an unbeliever. Even unbelievers take care of their families. Was Paul suggesting that a man should protect his family from starvation and illness, but not from rapists and murderers? Does that make any sense to you? You know, we could use the same logic that Paul uses here, and we could even say the heathen will protect the lives of their family if someone is trying to hurt or kill them.

Reason number three why I believe that a Christian has the right to defend himself even if it requires lethal force relates to what John the Baptist told the soldiers.

This is where some soldiers believed John's preaching, and they responded to his command to repent. What did John tell them to do? This is Luke 3:14. The Bible says, Likewise the soldiers asked him, that is, they asked John the Baptist, saying, And what shall we do? And so he said to them, Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages. I want you to notice, John did not tell them, Well, in order to repent, you have got to stop being soldiers. That is a violent thing, and a Christian or a follower of God cannot do that. What he told them was, Do not abuse your power. In essence he said, Be good soldiers. Cornelius was a Roman military

officer responsible for commanding 100 soldiers. We have no record of him being told to discontinue his military role (Acts 10). Likewise, the Philippian jailer was not instructed to change professions following his conversion in Acts 16. The fact is, there is no record of a Christian ever being condemned for military service. There is no passage where military service or police service is ever condemned in the Bible.

Reason number four. There are not separate laws for Christians and non-Christians. Now, why is that important? Because it is argued by many who take the pacifist position that a non-Christian could serve as a police officer and could use lethal force, but a Christian could not. A non-Christian could serve in the military and take up arms in defense of his country, but if a Christian did that, they would say that he would be sinning. And so a woman is being assaulted and a police officer hears her screaming and he runs to the rescue. Just as he arrives, the assailant has a crowbar in his hand and he is about to bash her in the head. The officer shoots the man and saves the woman's life. Did he do the right thing or did he sin? Well, some would say it depends on whether or not he is a Christian. They would say, if he is a Christian, then he sinned; if he is a non-Christian, then he saved the day. But the point that I am making is there is not two different laws in effect today, one for the Christian and one for the non-Christian. If it was wrong for the Christian to shoot the man, then it was wrong for the non-Christian to shoot the man. And if it was right for the non-Christian, then it was right for the Christian.

Some people who are pacifists make this argument correctly when it comes to the subject of marriage,

divorce and remarriage. One of the errors that is taught in the church today with regard to marriage, divorce and remarriage is that only Christians are amenable to the law of Christ. They would say that if a man entered into an unscriptural marriage before he became a Christian, then he can remain in that marriage. They would argue that Christ's law on marriage did not apply to him. Well, of course, that's as false as false can be. But some good individuals who are teachers and preachers who stand up against this and correctly point out that God only has one law for mankind today will then turn around and by implication make a similar argument. They will suggest by implication that God has separate laws today with regard to the issue of our present discussion. They will argue that a non-Christian can be a defender of his country, serving as a soldier or as a policeman or as a judge or as the one who pulls the switch in the electric chair, but they would say that a Christian cannot. Friends, I am telling you there is only one law today. That is the law of Christ. And whether a person is a Christian or a non-Christian, everyone is amenable to that same law.

So what does that law say? Listen to Romans chapter 13 beginning in verse 1. The Bible says:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.
For there is no authority except from God, and the
authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Now, I want you to keep in mind that those of the pacifist position will argue that a Christian cannot serve in this role. Yet the Bible says these are positions appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the

ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good.

Friends, that means a police officer is a minister of God for good. Keep reading.

But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Now, what do we learn from this passage? We learn that the government exists by the authority of God; we learn that the government exists to do good and to punish evil; we learn that when we resist the government, we are resisting God; and that government and government officials are authorized by God to use the sword, to use a weapon. To the Romans, the sword was a symbol of the power of life and death. It was the instrument that was used to execute criminals. Paul speaks of it here with reference to the government's authority to take life, when necessary, to protect the innocent and to punish the wicked and to maintain order. So that means that police officers and soldiers and executioners function as ministers of God for the good of society, and we are supposed to support them with our tax dollars.

What is the point of all of this? Since there is only one law for mankind today, if it is right for a non-Christian to serve in these roles, then it is also right for a Christian to serve in these roles. The Christian has the right to defend his family, his community and his country. I believe the Christian has the right to use force to defend, to include

violence and lethal force, because, (1) Christ told His disciples to carry weapons; (2), because of the charge that I have to provide for and care for my family; (3) because of the principle of Luke 3:14; and (4) because there are not two separate laws in effect today, one for the Christian and one for the non-Christian. If it is right for the non-Christian to do these things, then it is right for the child of God as well.

Suppose a pacifist came along and said, Well, I agree, there is only one law for mankind today, and I think it is wrong for anyone to use violence to protect himself or to protect others. I think it would be wrong for anyone to be a policeman or a soldier. I think that God just tolerates it. I think God just uses evil men to accomplish evil deeds, just like when He used Judas in his plan to betray Christ. What if somebody said that? Friends, if the armed forces sin when they use the sword to protect their citizens, then a Christian sins when he calls upon the armed forces to protect him. If a policeman sins when he pulls his gun to protect me, then I sin when I call the police to protect me. Now, why is that? Because we are responsible for what we do through the agency of others.

If I were to ask someone to steal something for me, I would be guilty of that crime. Somebody says, I don't know about that. Let me prove that from the Bible. The Jews called upon Pilate. They called upon the Roman government to kill Christ. But in Acts 2:23 the Bible says they were guilty of that crime. We are guilty of that which we do through the agency of others. Now, incidentally, as a side note, in Acts 23 when Paul's life was in danger, there were more than 40 individuals who were going to

assassinate him. On that occasion Paul called upon the Roman soldiers to protect him. Did he sin when he did that? So if a pacifist takes the position that non-Christians can use lethal force, then we all can, because there is only one law applying to all men today. If a pacifist takes the position that no one can use lethal force, then we sin when we call the police for help, and in essence we are left defenseless. It means that we are at the mercy of whatever evil this world does to us, and we really have no protection whatsoever.

Point number two. I want to talk about the pacifist position. Here is the first thing. There is what I would call the extreme pacifist or the strict pacifist. What I mean by this is a person who believes that all killing is wrong. This is the person who would picket at the execution of a rapist, a murderer or a child molester. They would argue that the Bible says, “Thou shalt not kill.” They take that to mean that all killing is wrong. But in reality what the Bible forbids is murder. There’s a very clear distinction between murder and killing. All murder is wrong. Not all killing is wrong, but all murder is wrong. Murder is the unlawful, unauthorized taking of human life.

That definition is important. In the past, I have defined murder as the unlawful taking of innocent human life. I have tweaked that, because I have omitted the part about innocent human life. I believe there could be a situation, and I think there regularly are situations, where innocent life might be taken and it not be murder.

Let me give you an example of this. Consider when the United States dropped the bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Thousands of innocent people died. But I

would contend that that was not murder. It was an action authorized by Romans 13. The government had the right to take such an action. So murder is the unauthorized taking of human life.

Capital punishment is killing, but it is not murder. In Genesis 9:6, God laid out a timeless moral principle. He said:

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

Now, that requires that a murderer be put to death by his fellow man. Is such an execution killing? Yes, it is killing. Is it murder? No, it is not murder. Well, that tells me that there is such a thing as right killing and such a thing as wrong killing. That was true in the Old Testament. It is true in the New Testament.

Point number two, let's talk about the second type of pacifist. This category of people do not believe that it is always wrong to kill or always wrong to be a policeman or a soldier or the one who throws the switch; he only believes that it is wrong if you are a Christian. And once again, there's a very serious implication that comes along with this, and that is that God has two laws in effect today, one for the Christian and one for the non-Christian. Well, let us lay this out logically. If the Bible teaches that all men are amenable to the law of Christ, and it does, and the law of Christ teaches that it is possible for a non-Christian to take the life of an evildoer, then the law of Christ also teaches it is possible for a Christian to take the life of an evildoer. It is a sound and solid argument.

Point number three. I want to talk about some

of the arguments made by the pacifists as to why they hold the position that they do. First, the pacifists would suggest that we are to love our enemies. Matthew 5:44 is sometimes cited:

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use and persecute you.

H. Leo Boles, who was a pacifist, cited this particular passage, and said this: Love your enemies. Men do not love their enemies when they are trying to kill them. War nullifies this principle and therefore is opposed to Christianity. My first question would be, why should my love for my enemy supersede my love for my family? Should I stand idly by and allow my family or helpless victims to be raped or mutilated or murdered?

Some other passages also immediately come to my mind. How about Matthew 22:39, and loving my neighbor as myself? How about Matthew 7:12, the golden rule? How could I claim to obey those verses while not taking necessary action to protect an innocent victim? Surely that is not how I want to be treated. In essence, by not helping the victim, I am taking the side of the attacker. Should I love the murderer more than the one who is being beaten to death?

I think there is a basic misunderstanding here about love. Consider Ananias and Sapphira. Did God love them when He killed them? Well, of course He did. In Leviticus 19:17, God commanded the children of Israel, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But then in the next chapter, chapter 20 and verse 2, He said that if any of them worshiped

Molech, the people were to kill them with stones. He said to love them, but if they committed this transgression, then kill them. You see, love does not exclude punishment. In fact, sometimes it demands it.

Number two, sometimes pacifists will argue this: They will say Christians are forbidden to retaliate. And it is pointed out that Romans 12:17-21 says that Christians are not to take revenge. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Furthermore, it says that we are to live peaceably with all men and that we are to repay no man evil for evil. Can that passage rightfully be used to show that non-Christians can serve in the military and be police officers and take life, but Christians can not? Of course not! Whatever that verse means, it means to Christians and it means the same thing to non-Christians. Is it the case that Christians are not to take revenge, but non-Christians can? No. Is it the case that Christians are to live peaceably, but non-Christians do not have to? Of course not. Whatever this passage means to the Christian, it means to the non-Christian. What does it mean? It means that none of us are to seek personal revenge. None of us are to have the "I will fix you" mentality. When personal retaliation is the goal, then you do not do it. God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." Just a few verses later, God tells us about one of the ways that He goes about repayment, about taking justice; and that is via the government. He tells us that the government is a tool that He uses to carry out His justice. In fact, let me put this in the form of an example. My neighbor is drunk, disorderly and he comes and throws a brick at my car. I do not take it upon myself to carry out vengeance. God has a system for that. It involves calling

the police. I call them. They are ministers of God for good against those who do evil. The same sort of thing is argued sometimes with regard to Matthew 5:39, turn the other cheek. But that does not mean that if people physically attack me that I just have to take it, that I can not defend myself. Jesus told His disciples to get a sword so they could defend themselves.

Number three. Sometimes pacifists will argue that Christians are not to be involved in carnal warfare. There is really no passage that says that. I am going to talk some more about that later. If a Christian is not to be involved in carnal warfare, then neither is a non-Christian, because remember, the same law applies to both of them.

As I was prepared for this lesson, I read the writings of a number of people who hold the pacifist position. I saw a lot of quotations that stated that our battle is a spiritual battle, that we wrestle not against flesh and blood and the Lord's kingdom is not of this world. Those are simply passages relating to the Lord's spiritual kingdom. God's spiritual kingdom is not comprised of physical wars. We do not make converts at the end of a sword. Our battle against Satan is not against a physical dragon. We use the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), not a physical sword to carry out our spiritual battles. But you know, none of that precludes a Christian serving in the military or being a policeman. If I serve in the military, my spiritual battles are still spiritual ones.

A Christian man will sometimes have to take off his belt and engage in corporal punishment. That is, he may have to give his son a spanking. Is someone going to come along and say to him, Now, brother, we wrestle not

against flesh and blood. You should not be using physical punishment against your son. Everyone understands that does not make sense. Having to physically engage in physical punishment against one's son in no way contradicts these Bible passages. In fact, such action is in accordance with what the Bible teaches. In the same sense, serving in the military is functioning as a minister of God for good. The Lord condemns using the sword for advancing His kingdom, but He authorizes it for use by civil authorities for social and civil purposes.

Argument number four. Sometimes it is argued that we can't fight in the Lord's kingdom, which is by far the greater kingdom, so how could we think that we could fight in the kingdoms of men, in the kingdoms of the world? Well, they are two different kinds of kingdoms. The spiritual kingdom only allows for spiritual fighting. The physical kingdom requires carnal, physical actions.

Argument number five. Sometimes the golden rule is brought up. Matthew 7:12, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets." Now, please do not grow weary of me saying this, but this applies to Christians and to non-Christians. If this verse precludes Christians from punishing evildoers, then it also precludes non-Christians from doing the same. And if we are going to reason this way, don't you think that those who are in prison would like to be released, if we are going to make that type of application of the golden rule? We have to understand that the golden rule doesn't require us to allow evil to go unchecked. Foy Wallace said this. He was talking about this argument, misusing the golden rule in this way. He said,

That puts the golden rule to working in reverse. It commits the golden rule to protect the wrongdoer and desert the victim. It forces the teaching of Christ to aid the evildoer, and it makes the Sermon on the Mount a bill of rights for criminals.

Argument number six. Sometimes the pacifists, those who hold to the pacifist position, will argue that Romans 13 makes a distinction between the Christian and the government. They would say that Christians are not included in the government, that Christians cannot serve in government capacities in which they would punish evil and bear the sword. I suggest to you that this passage in Romans 13 could have been written to a congregation that was made up of 50% soldiers. The language would have been the same. The contrast is not between the government and Christians. The contrast is between individuals and the corporate entity of government. In fact, listen to it. Romans 13 begins, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.” What is written here applies to every soul, not just Christians. That makes sense, because the law of Christ applies to everybody. The fact is, nowhere in the Bible do we find separate laws for Christians and non-Christians with regard to the roles they may serve in the government or with regard to self-defense.

Our final point. Let us talk about implications of the pacifist position. Implication number one: If a Christian steps in and uses force to prevent a rape or a murder, then he is committing a sin equivalent to that of the murderer. Now, that would be an implication. Surely we can see that is not right. Surely we can see that those two things

are not on the same level. A second implication of the pacifist's position would be this: If the police SIN when they protect us, then we sin when we call upon them to protect us. That would be the implication. Implication number three: If the pacifist's position is right, then if a policeman is on his way to be baptized and sees a gunman who's about to murder some innocent children, he could pull out his gun, and he could shoot that murderer and save the children. But he goes on and he's baptized and he's on his way home, and he sees another murderer about to kill some children, he then could not pull his gun to protect the children, or he would be sinning if he did so.

Number four, every thief, every robber, every murderer, every rapist should hope for a mass conversion of the police force to Christianity. That would be an implication. Implication number five: If pacifism is true, if your family is ever attacked, the last person you would want standing by you would be a Christian. You would have to think, Please let that man standing there be a heathen who has no accountability to the law of Christ so that he can help me. Foy Wallace wrote this. It's a strong statement, but listen to it and consider it carefully. He wrote,

The idea that men who are not Christians can be soldiers and officers to protect the Christian by doing that which a Christian himself could not do is about the most conveniently selfish and cowardly convenient doctrine ever pronounced by good men.

Are Only Members Of The Church Of Christ Going To Heaven?

B. J. Clarke



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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been asked the above question? How did you respond? How should we respond? I have observed two extremes when it comes to how this question is sometimes answered. One sister in Christ told me that when someone asked her this question she responded, “No, that is just a big ugly rumor that someone started about the Church of Christ to try and

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make us look bad.” I responded, “Please tell me that is not how you left that conversation.” Needless to say, her answer was inaccurate and quite insufficient in providing the needed information to the person who asked her the question.

On the other hand, some answer the question in the affirmative, but often do so abruptly and abrasively. They come across as cold or condescending, or both. Their tone comes across as, “Yes, and how could you not know that? If you don’t like it, that’s tough. You’ll just have to get over it.” It is often the case that one overreaction leads to another, and so, some brethren, who have friends, neighbors, co-workers and loved ones, who have been turned off by the rude and belittling way that other brethren have responded to this question, have decided to dodge the question altogether. They know the right answer, but are determined to keep it to themselves in the interest of peace. They change the subject to something else, or just ignore the question entirely.

Surely, there is a better way. The question in the title above should not send us running in fear. Rather, we should seize the opportunity to answer it. At the same time, we should endeavor to answer the question in a manner that combines compassion and conviction. Because this question is often asked with high emotions, some clarifying statements need to be made to ensure that the answer is understood both biblically and rationally.

**WHO HAS THE AUTHORITY TO
ANSWER THIS QUESTION?**

One of the most crucial things to establish is what

source of authority we are using to answer the question. The question is **not**, “Do I think, or do you think, that only members of the Church of Christ are going to heaven?” We need to make it crystal clear that only God has the right to determine who is going to heaven, and who is not. We are not the authority in answering this or any question pertaining to eternal salvation. All authority resides in God (Mat. 28:18-20).

But how can we discover what God has determined on this subject? Do we just wait for Him to tell us in some personal vision whether we are saved or not saved? There were times when God spoke to men directly in visions, and prophetic declarations, but in these last days, He speaks unto us through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Mat. 3:17; 17:5; Acts 3:22). Does this mean that Jesus has to talk directly to us to tell us whether we are going to heaven? Not at all! Jesus said that the Word He has spoken will judge men in the last day (John 12:48). The Word He has spoken came from the Father (John 12:48-50), and was transmitted to the apostles by the Holy Spirit (John 14-16), so that

all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Accordingly, “the judgment of God is according to truth” (Rom. 2:2). Jesus said, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Therefore, the judgment of God is according to the Word of God. Hence, the precise question is, “What does God’s Word teach about whether one must

be a member of the Church of Christ to go to heaven?”

Of course, the sad truth is that not everyone accepts the authority of Scripture. In this broad-minded age it is considered arrogant and offensive to suggest that anyone will be excluded from going to heaven. Ours is an age of all-inclusiveness. To hear folks tell it today, you would think that everyone is going to heaven—except for those who have the audacity to suggest that some are not going. Apparently, in the minds of some, the number of damnable sins man may commit today has been reduced to one—to tell someone else that they are wrong. The message of modern man seems to be that it is wrong to judge someone else to be wrong—unless, of course, you are the one pointing out how wrong it is for others to tell people that they are wrong. Even some who claim to believe the Bible are very critical of anyone who would teach that certain people will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

In view of the antagonism that exists in our culture today toward absolute truth, how can we help modern man to understand the exclusive nature of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ? We need to lay some foundations of respect. First, we must convince man that God’s Word is the measuring stick which determines right from wrong and which sets the standards for sin and salvation from sin (2 Tim. 3:16-17). For those who accept the Bible as the plenary, verbally inspired Word of God, there is a logical way to answer the question—both plainly and lovingly. While I would not suggest the following method is the best or only method to use in answering this question, this approach has been

useful in Bible studies on numerous occasions. We shall answer the question by asking, and answering several major questions.

WHO ARE THE ONLY ONES GOING TO HEAVEN?

When someone asks, “Is it true that you believe only members of the Church of Christ are going to heaven?”, try the following steps: (1) Acknowledge the importance of the question and thank the person for asking it. (2) Say something like this: “Your question is so important that I do not want to give you my opinion on the matter. May we look instead at how Jesus answered the question?” If the person is unwilling to look at Scripture, then you are not going to convert them anyway. If they agree to look at the Scriptures, take them to Matthew 7:21-23. Ask them to read the text. Once they have read this passage, lovingly ask the following questions:

(1) According to Jesus, in this text, **will everyone who calls Him Lord be saved to enter the kingdom of heaven?** Give them time to consider the text and discover that the answer is “No.” “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...” (Mat. 7:21).

(2) According to Jesus, **will many religious minded folks be astonished to learn on the Day of Judgment that Jesus did not know them approvingly?** Give them time to read and discover that the answer is “Yes” (Mat. 7:22-23).

(3) According to Jesus, in Matthew 7:21, **who are**

the only ones who shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven? We should not rush them to give an answer. If they seem hesitant to respond, point them lovingly back to re-read the text and discover that this Scripture comes right out and identifies the only ones who will enter into the kingdom of heaven—“he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” This same point is emphasized in Matthew 12:46-50.

(4) According to Jesus, **if the people of Matthew 7:22-23 had done the will of the Father in heaven, would they have been going to heaven?** Again, the textual answer is “Yes.” We know this is so because Jesus already explained, “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). Show me a man that is doing the will of the Father in heaven and I will show you a man who is going to heaven! Hence, the reason the religious people of Matthew 7:22-23 were not going to heaven is because they had not done the will of the Father in heaven, at least not sufficiently, for if they had done the will of the Father in heaven, they would have been going to heaven, according to Matthew 7:21!

After asking this series of questions, lovingly suggest the following: “Since Jesus teaches that only those who do the will of the Father in heaven will go to heaven, **when would be a good time for us to sit down together and study what the will of the Lord is, so that we can both make sure we are doing the will of the Father in heaven?**” If they suggest that we cannot understand the will of the Lord, point them to Ephesians

3:4 and 5:17. These texts teach that when we read the will of the Lord, we can understand it!

HOW MANY CHURCHES DID JESUS PROMISE TO BUILD?

After Peter declared Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it” (Mat. 16:18). Jesus never said anything about building a multiplicity of churches. He said, “I will build my church.”

HOW MANY CHURCHES WERE ESTABLISHED ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST?

Did Jesus ever make good on His promise to build the church? Indeed, on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus established His church, for we know that those who gladly received the Word were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Please observe that those saved on Pentecost did not join different churches with a variety of different doctrines. They were all added to the same church. Whose church was it? It was the church of (belonging to) Christ. After all, He purchased it with His own blood when He gave Himself for it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).

HAS GOD EVER SELECTED ONE PLAN/PLACE FOR SALVATION?

The concept of God confining salvation to one place, and to only those who obey His Will, is not a new one. The concept encompasses both Testaments.

Old Testament Examples

The Old Testament was written for our learning (Rom. 15:4), and there are many examples that assist us in understanding whether God ever used one place or one plan to save His people.

1. Was One Place As Good As Another During The Flood? Where was the location of salvation when the flood came? It was exclusively for those in the ark (Gen. 7:1; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Because the earth was corrupt and filled with violence, God purposed to destroy man from the face of the earth (Gen. 6:11-13). However, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8), and God established a covenant with him, promising to save him from the flood. For decades Noah preached a message of righteousness to the world (2 Pet. 2:5): “Repent or perish!” For the sake of illustration, picture one of Noah’s hearers asking him, “Do you think that you and your little group in the ark are the only ones who are going to be saved?” How would/should Noah have replied? Should he have said, “Well, there might be other ways to be saved,” or should he have specified the one and only location for salvation that God revealed unto him, namely, the ark of safety? Although some might have perceived this to be too narrowminded, the one and only location God provided for salvation from the flood was in the ark (1 Pet. 3:20). God’s way of salvation excluded all who were not in the ark!

2. How many different plans of salvation were revealed for the firstborn to be saved from the 10th plague? There was only one way the firstborn of the children of Israel could be delivered from death. It was

exclusively for those in the house(s) where the blood had been properly applied to the doorposts (Exo. 12:1-13). God forewarned His people that He would smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt (Exo. 12:12). However, God also devised a means of escape. He promised that, when He saw the blood of an approved lamb properly applied to the doorposts of the house, He would “pass over” and not destroy their firstborn (Exo. 12:7, 13). This plan of salvation was very specific, narrow, and exclusive of any other method or means. It was not one of many ways to escape the plague—it was **the one and only way!** Was a house without the blood of an approved lamb, and not properly applied to the doorposts of the house, just as good?

3. Was one house as good as another for Rahab and her family to be saved from the battle of Jericho? Because of the kindness Rahab demonstrated toward the spies, they promised her protection during the battle of Jericho. However, there was one important stipulation: she must remain in the house where the scarlet thread was hanging in the same window by which she let down the spies (Jos. 2:18). Of all the houses in Jericho, the spies specified only one house wherein Rahab and those with her could be guaranteed to be saved from the battle. All other houses were excluded! Was one color cord as good as another? Was one window as good as another? Yet, Rahab did not react negatively and say, “Well, if the way to be saved is so narrow, then I’m not interested.” She complied with these simple instructions and she and all her family with her were saved in the one place God had specified (Jos. 6:22-23).

4. Was one plan of salvation as good as another for those Israelites who had been bitten by fiery serpents? When the murmuring Israelites beckoned Moses to appeal to God for their salvation from the snakebites, God told Moses to erect a brass serpent so that whosoever would look upon that serpent would live (Num. 21:7-9). If they had decided instead to kill a lamb and place its blood on the two side posts and upper door posts of their houses, would that have worked as an acceptable substitute for looking upon the brass serpent? If they had asked, “Are you saying looking upon this particular brass serpent is the only way we can be saved from the snakebite?” what would the right answer have been?

5. Was one place/plan as good as another for Naaman to be cleansed from his leprosy? There was one place where Naaman could be cleansed from his leprosy—the River Jordan—and one plan for being cleansed in that river—to dip seven times (2 Kin. 5:1-14). Although God specified the Jordan River as the only place where Naaman could be cleansed, he sought to substitute rivers of his own choosing (2 Kin. 5:10-12). Was one river as good as another for Naaman’s cleansing? If Naaman had concocted the “Leper’s Prayer” and had prayed for God to cleanse him by prayer instead of by dipping in water, would that have been acceptable?

New Testament Examples

1. There is only one Person in Whom we can be saved. Salvation is in Christ. It is interesting to note that Jesus was both all-inclusive and exclusive in His

attitude toward the lost. He was all-inclusive in the sense that He invited “all” who are lost to be saved. He invited all who are weary and heavy laden to come unto Him (Mat. 11:28). He tasted death for “every man” (Heb. 2:9). He gave His life as a propitiation for the sins of the “whole world” (1 John 2:2). He commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to every creature because He desires the salvation of every creature (Mark 16:15). As far as Jesus is concerned, “Whosoever will” may come and take of the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

The grace of God was designed to bring the offer of salvation to all men (Tit. 2:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but Jesus made it abundantly clear that there is only one way that leads to heaven, and that many will be excluded from heaven because they did not travel that way. Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, “Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Jesus was an exclusivist when He said, “I am the door” (John 10:9). He did not say that He was one of many entrances into heaven—He is the one and only, the exclusive door into heaven! Indeed, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is only “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Eternal life is found only in the Son

of God (1 John 5:11; John 6:68). Salvation is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:10).

2. There is only one church wherein salvation may be found. It is the church of (belonging to) Christ. As noted above, Jesus Christ is the only One Who can save sinners (Mat. 1:21; Acts 4:12). But can a good man be saved by Jesus from the sins he has committed without becoming a member of the church that belongs to Christ? **Even this question must be clarified.** We are not asking whether a good man under the Patriarchal or Mosaic ages of Bible history could be saved without becoming a member of the New Testament church. We are not asking whether an unaccountable person (innocent child or one mentally incapable of obedience) can be saved out of the church. They are safe and don't need to be saved.

We also are not asking whether one can be saved without being a member of a denominational church. Almost all denominations freely admit that you can be saved without being a member of their particular denomination. We are asking whether a good man, in our time, can be saved from his sins without becoming a member of the church which Christ established in the New Testament?

It is absolutely crucial to clarify that when we speak of the church of Christ we are not talking about a denomination among denominations. Some people in the religious world erroneously believe that we are saying, "Of all the denominations in the world today, the Church of Christ is the best denomination of them all, and thus you must be a member of our Church of Christ

denomination in order to be saved.” I have never believed nor taught such a doctrine. Some years ago, after a series of studies with a Methodist couple, the light went on in the mind of the wife, who said to me excitedly, “Wait a minute—you’re not asking us to leave our denomination for the Church of Christ denomination. You’re asking us to leave denominationalism altogether and just be members of the church of Christ we can read about in the New Testament?” When I assured her that she was exactly right about my intentions she said, “Shall we go to the pond?” She wanted to be baptized immediately so that she might be added to Christ’s church, the church belonging to Christ, the church of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; Rom. 16:16).

Did she and her husband do the right thing when they were baptized that evening? Did they have to do what they did, or would they have been just fine if they had remained in denominationalism? Does one have to be a member of the church of Christ in order to be saved? When I am studying with someone about these questions, particularly whether one has to be a member of the church of Christ in order to go to heaven, I like to let the Bible do the answering, and it only takes three verses. I will sometimes say, “Instead of giving you my answer to this question, it would be much better to consider the answer given by the inspired apostle Paul in the Book of Ephesians. May we consider just three simple statements?”

The first passage is Ephesians 5:23, which declares that Christ “is the Savior of the body.” The passage is plain: only those in the body can be saved, because

Christ is the Savior of the body—not of those outside of the body. After reading this text, I will ask the one with whom I am studying, **“From this text, how would you answer the question, “Does one have to be a member of the body of Christ in order to be saved”?** Almost without exception they will reply, “Yes.” If language has any meaning at all, then the answer is “Yes—one must be a member of the body of Christ in order to be saved because Christ is the Savior of those who are in His body.” Sinners who are outside of the body of Christ are excluded from salvation because they are not in that which Jesus will save.

The second text is Ephesians 4:4, wherein we learn that “there is one body.” We have already learned that one must be in the body in order to be saved, for Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). However, there are hundreds of religious bodies in the world today. Yet, according to Ephesians 4:4 “there is one body.” Hence, **since salvation is in the body, and there is one body, must I be a member of the one body spoken of in Ephesians 4:4 in order to be saved?**

The third passage is Ephesians 1:22-23 from which we learn that Jesus has been made head over all things to **the church, “which is his body.”** Thus, according to inspired Scripture, the body of Christ is the same thing as the church of Christ. We have already established that one must be a member of the one body of Christ in order to be saved (Eph. 4:4; 5:23). But the body of Christ is the same thing as the church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, one must be a member of the church of Christ in order to be saved.

So, should it be thought an impossible thing that God could confine salvation to one location? Just as one had to be inside Noah's ark to be saved from the flood, (Gen. 7:7, 17; 1 Pet. 3:20), and just as one had to be in the house where the blood of an authorized lamb was applied to the doorposts, to be saved from the death of the firstborn (Exo. 12:7ff), and just as one had to be in Rahab's house to be saved from the battle of Jericho (Jos. 2, 6), one must be in the house of God which is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15).

Conclusion

No man is good enough not to need a Savior. The Rich Young Ruler was a good man in so many ways, but **he was not good enough** (Mark 10:17-25). Cornelius was a very good man, but **he was not good enough** (Acts 10:1-2, 22; 11:14)? Even good men are sinners who need to be saved (1 Kin. 8:46; Ecc. 7:20; Rom. 3:10, 23).

On the Day of Judgment, Jesus will deliver up the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). How can one be saved to go to heaven if they are not in that which Jesus will deliver up to the Father? The church is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27) and just as one bride was not as good as another to Jacob (Gen. 29), one bride is not as good as another to Jesus, the Bridegroom. How can one enjoy the heavenly marriage feast with the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9) if they are not a part of the bride of Christ, His church (Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17)?

If one can be saved outside of the church of Christ, then the blood of Christ is unnecessary, for it cost

ARE ONLY MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST GOING TO HEAVEN?

Christ His blood to purchase the church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). If one can be saved outside of the church of Christ, then one can be saved outside of Christ, for He is the head of the body, the church, and you cannot separate the head from the body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23). Are you sure you are in the one church that belongs to Christ, the one body of which He is the Savior?

Church Discipline: The Forgotten Commandment

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Discipline is one of those words that immediately incites a response. To some, hearing the word discipline brings to mind a strict authoritarian teacher, parent, or boss. This image incites anger, frustration, and many other negative connotations within these people's hearts. With that in mind, one can see why this subject could be easily forgotten. It would be interesting to poll most congregations of the Lord's church asking them how many have practiced, or continue to practice, corrective church discipline. No doubt the numbers would be small. Of course, we must be clear as to what we mean by "corrective church discipline" if this study is going to make any sense.

Most Christians would agree that there are two different types of biblical discipline. The first type of biblical discipline is instructive or informative discipline. This form of discipline covers teaching and preaching the message of God. The goal of this discipline

is to instruct students to make changes based upon the profitable message of God's Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This form of discipline should be constant (2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). The second form of biblical discipline is corrective discipline. This is the "last straw" aspect of discipline. Many, in the religious world, refer to this as excommunication. "It is the church's public statement that it can no longer affirm the person's profession of faith by calling him or her a Christian. It's a refusal to give a person the Lord's Supper. It's excommunicating, or ex-communicating, the person" (Leeman 27-28). This is not however, how the Bible describes the process. It is true that there is an admonition to not eat with a rebellious impenitent soul (1 Cor. 5:11). There is, however, no power in man to kick one in or out of the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). Mr. Leeman is correct in that it is not possible to affirm one's profession of faith if he or she is practicing sinfulness and unwilling to repent (Mat. 12:33). At this point inaction by God's faithful is completely unacceptable (Rom. 15:1). One elder, under whom I once served, used to make the point that the withdrawal of fellowship is the failure of instructive church discipline. He was not implying that God's way doesn't work. His point was that since the wayward failed to repent at the informative instruction of God's Word, there was no other option but to withdraw fellowship (Tit. 3:10; 2 The. 3:14-15).

Discipline is not a new study, nor is it something that is really hard to understand. Church discipline is just hard for most to accept. This is true due to the lack of it being taught or practiced in main stream religion.

New Testament Christianity demands its adherents to, not only know this subject, but to practice it faithfully (Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:11; Tit. 3:10; 2 The. 3:14-15). It is a sad reality that for the most part this command is forgotten, and many want to keep it that way. The goal of this work is to ask the question, “Why is church discipline considered a forgotten commandment?” If the Lord were to give out letter grades for each congregation’s involvement in church discipline, what would be our grade? In all honesty, most would have to say “F.” Having been blessed to work under a great eldership who faithfully practice both instructive and corrective discipline, I am convinced that the reason could be summed up by the words **fear**, **failure**, and **focus**.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS THE FORGOTTEN COMMANDMENT BECAUSE OF FEAR

Often, we make decisions, or fail to make them, because of fear. We are reminded of some “chief rulers” in the first century who “believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:” (John 12:42). Fear can only rule where imperfect love is allowed to live (1 John 4:8). We must remember the fate awaiting the fearful (Rev. 21:8). What do we fear? “One of the reformers being told, ‘All the world are (sic BK) against you,’ replied, ‘Then I am against all the world’” (Tan 283). On the tomb of John Knox are the words, “Here lies the man who never feared the face of clay” (283). Standing strong against the fear of man is all part of

God's plan. God told Joshua not to be afraid (Jos. 1:5-9). Jesus explained where our fear should be placed (Mat. 10:28).

Many elderships and congregations have forgotten the commandment of discipline due to their fear of repercussions. The fact is, when a congregation starts faithfully practicing all aspects of biblical discipline, some "members" will leave.

Church leaders want to reach outsiders, but this good desire produces a bad temptation—to slim down the gospel to something skinnier. It's comparatively easy to talk about God's grace, unconditional love, and faith. It's harder to talk about God's holiness, Christ's lordship, a Spirit-given repentance, and the new covenant reality of the church. All these things make demands on a person. They produce the need for accountability. And when you build a church on a gospel that makes few demands and offers little accountability, church discipline just doesn't make sense." (Leeman 9).

This is not what we or God desires (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). This fear is focused outward more so than upward and reveals a problem inward. Shouldn't we fear the repercussions of disobeying God more than appeasing one another's feelings (Heb. 10:31)?

Fear has taken hold of many congregations because we fail to understand the purpose of biblical discipline. Too many seem to believe that the withdrawal of fellowship is what makes one lost. Impenitence is what makes one lost (Luke 13:3, 5; Mat. 18:15-20). This lack of understanding shows us why biblical discipline must

be faithfully, and fearfully taught. The sad reality is, that the majority of mankind will be lost (Mat. 7:13-14). Christians need to know that judgement begins with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:7). Do we really believe that God will overlook our forgetting any of His commands, just because we were afraid (Mat. 25:25-30).

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS THE FORGOTTEN COMMANDMENT BECAUSE WE HAVE FAILED

When the subject of discipline comes up you can count on someone saying, “We’ve never done that here.” Though this may be true, it does not make it acceptable. Christianity has change and self-denial ingrained in its DNA. Repentance is a prerequisite to one’s entrance in the kingdom (Acts 2:38). Repentance from the Greek word *metanoēō* is a verb meaning “*to repent, change one’s mind.*” In the New Testament, it generally refers not simply to changing one’s mind but to turning back to God” (DiFransico). Jesus said that anyone choosing to follow Him would have to deny himself on a daily basis (Luke 9:23). Self-denial is not an easy process and it will never happen without true love being at the foundation.

We cannot use traditions of the past as our standard of faith. Tradition is only as good as its foundation (2 The. 2:15). Paul also used the word tradition in reference to discipline (2 The. 3:6). One must note however, Paul’s basis for these “traditions” was divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The simple fact that “We have not practiced the biblical action of loving

discipline” shows disregard for the authority of God (Gal. 6:2; Luke 6:46); the wellbeing of the family of God (Gal. 6:1a; Rom. 15:1); and the consideration of our own souls (Gal. 6:1b; 1 Cor. 10:12).

Just because we have failed to practice discipline in the past does not mean that we cannot repent and return to this fundamental biblical principle. This brings to mind the time Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord which had been lost (2 Chr. 34:14-28). When God’s people do what He says there is nothing to fear, but when His people refuse, they choose His wrath (Heb. 10:31). “We never have” is not a sound strategy for diluting the Word of God.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS THE FORGOTTEN COMMANDMENT BECAUSE WE HAVE LOST FOCUS

Foy L. Smith said, “Today, about every sin that can be found in the world can also be found in the church” (Smithson 4). Is this because of ignorance, apathy, or rebellion? Could it be that we have simply lost our focus? Focus has been defined as “the center of interest or activity” (Oxford Dictionaries). We as individuals and congregations have seen a growing trend to focus on not making waves, moreso than stirring up faithfulness (Acts 17:6). In what ways has our lack of focus made discipline a forgotten commandment?

We have lost focus on what it means to be lost. Many of us often quote Jesus saying many will be lost and few saved (Mat. 7:13-14). Jesus also said, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white

already to harvest” (John 4:35). We must not become too comfortable with saying one is lost, if we do, we have lost focus (Jam. 5:20). When we truly focus on our friends and family facing the reality of eternal condemnation, how could we refuse to do everything God says in order to try and save/restore them?

Some of our focus has been on false teachings concerning discipline (i.e. excommunication etc.) more than it has been on God’s Word? Often, when considering corrective discipline (i.e. withdrawing fellowship) people see the discipline as the cause for their loved one being lost. They say things like, “If you withdraw fellowship from them, they will never come back.” Those who do so have lost focus on the fact that their loved one’s unwillingness to repent is what has condemned their souls (Luke 13:3-5; Acts 17:30-31). We are told not to “keep company” with those who choose to walk contrary to the doctrine of Christ (2 The. 3:14). Paul gave the doctrinal focus behind this command with the words “that he may be ashamed” (2 The. 3:14b). Paul clarified the doctrinal disposition of heart that we must have toward the impenitent when he said, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 The 3:15).

Sadly, many “Christians” have lost their focus on Who God is, and what He desires. We must be reminded of the fact that we cannot love more perfectly than God. God is love (1 John 4:8). God expresses His love in the most magnificent way (John 3:16). God’s love, however, often looks much different than what many call love today. God’s love is displayed by sacrifice, and

on that most would agree. There is, however, another less popular way in which God displays His love and that is through chastisement (Heb. 12:6-7).

We must refocus on the fact that all sin hurts God. He is not willing that any perish (2 Pet. 3:9). He would have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). In fact, Godly sorrow is the only thing that will bring one to genuine repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). Maybe we need to focus on whether or not we are a help or a hinderance to the cause of Christ. How we teach and practice discipline has a bearing on answering that question.

Clearly, many have lost focus upon who we are as Christians. Some shepherds have focused upon building maintenance to the neglect of the sheep's nourishment (Acts 20:28). If a congregation's leadership is focused upon the whole counsel of God, their response toward the lost will be evident.

Tell these members that twenty-year-old Johnny has been absent for two years. They won't shrug their shoulders and sigh, "Once saved always saved," and get on with their work of singing praise songs. They will get on the phone and try to find Johnny, ask him for lunch plans, see how he's doing. They will call him to account for his claim to be a Christian. They might even, as a last-ditch effort to help him, excommunicate him. They love him too much not to. They love his non-Christian friends and colleagues too much not to (Leeman 14-16).

We are supposed to be salt and light in this world (Mat. 5:13-16). Loving corrective discipline is like salt, it burns when it is applied to a wound. Loving

corrective discipline is like light, it burns the eyes of those accustomed to the dark. We cannot allow the temporary discomfort the lost feels to hinder us from being the salt and light our Savior expects us to be. Even if it were possible to gain the entire world, if we lose our souls, we profit nothing (Mat. 16:26). We must remember how valuable each soul is to the Lord (Luke 15). Jesus emphasized the effort the shepherd put forth to find the one sheep, and the woman who swept the house looking for the one lost coin (Luke 15:3-10). In each case there was joy in Heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). This parable was meant to strike at the heart of those Pharisees and Scribes who were unwilling to see the value of the publicans and sinners (Luke 15:1). If my soul is that important to the Lord, and your soul is that important to the Lord, we should see every soul as being that important to the Lord.

Conclusion

Discipline is so much more than just a withdrawal of fellowship. God expects His people to be vigilant in protecting His family. Just as Paul informed the congregation in Corinth to “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:7); we must not overlook the admonition “to reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Church discipline may be a forgotten commandment, but it is a commandment none the less. To say that we do not have to practice this command begs the question, “How many other commands can we forget or ignore?” (Mat. 7:21). God

is counting on His people to watch out for one another (Gal. 6:1-2). Will we continue to allow fear, failure, and focus make us have spiritual amnesia? God's way is always the best way and it will work if we are willing to work it. Remember, church discipline is not a hard subject to understand, it is just hard for some people to accept.

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Judging: Calling Sin, Sin

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How marvelous it is to be a Christian! How blessed we are to have the inspired Word of God that instructs us in the way of salvation! How comforting to know that we can read, understand, believe and obey the truth that can save us from sin (John 8:32)! How wonderful to teach the truth of our loving Saviour to a lost and dying world, without addition or deletion! How respectful we should be in “handling aright” (2 Tim. 2:15, ASV) the Word of God!

A few foundational questions to consider: Is it possible to determine if water is poisonous or pure? Can experts determine if a painting is a replica or an original Van Gogh? Can trained United States Government employees determine if a \$100 bill is genuine or counterfeit? Is it possible for an imitator to resemble

another person, but friends can know the truth? The answer to each question is a solid YES! It certainly is possible for one to examine the evidence and accurately KNOW the truth, right from wrong, good fruit from evil fruit.

Consider also for a moment our judicial system – in the court room the lawyers present evidence, testimony, documentation for and against the matter at hand. The jury (or judge) takes the evidence and reaches a verdict.

In a similar way, in religious matters, we can ascertain, determine and JUDGE, the truth from the evidence. Upon careful examination of the Word of God (the authority) we can know what is right and we can know what is wrong. We not only can, we must do so!

CONDITIONS THAT PRESENTLY EXIST

How often it is said, “We should not judge one another!” “It is sinful to be judgmental.” “Jesus Himself said, ‘Judge not.’” Tragically our world at present is so passive and many feel that no one should condemn anyone for anything. The cries of the vocal ones is for tolerance – yet they often are SO intolerant of others who take a position different than their own.

Recently I was personally attacked and condemned in the following words:

I have been greatly influenced by the horrible, negative teaching that has come from you, your lectureship, and your cohorts in the ultra right wing establishment. The exclusivity of your message and your damning tone ... have driven me away ... I can see you have driven millions

away from the beauty of the message of Jesus ...
I have grown more passionate as I've written this
... There is no need for further conversation.

Yet the posts on the web site by this same advocate of false doctrines states “spiritual growth begins with love and nurturing,” “You are safe to question and grow here,” “loving, and inclusive spiritual community.” How tragically unbelievable that one can depart from the faith so far as to accept others living in blatant sin, even in a homosexual or transgender lifestyle, but reject one who is pleading for the simple, powerful, saving message of Jesus Christ!

Please consider this fact: It is not judging when we say and teach exactly what the Judge of all mankind has stated!

UNCHANGABLE TRUTHS

Is truth relative? Changeable? Situational? Does truth change from generation to generation? Often those who claim to be an authority suggest spiritual truths are constantly changing (the way of salvation, acceptable worship, abortion, sexual restrictions, etc.). Such claims are blatantly false!

Notice the following unchangeable truths on which we must rely:

God Is. In the beginning was GOD (Gen. 1:1). He is eternal, forever has He been (Deu. 33:27; 1 Tim. 1:17) and forever He will be!

God Is Sovereign. Our Heavenly Father is all-powerful, everywhere present and all knowing (Eph. 3:20; Psa. 139).

Christ Is The Saviour, the only Saviour. Men may promise salvation, but they are helpless to fulfill their promises. God sent His Son (John 3:16) to reconcile, redeem and sanctify (Col. 1:20; Eph. 2:16). The risen Saviour has gone to prepare an eternal home for faithful followers (John 14:1-3). Jesus Christ, and Him only has the power to invite us to come to Him to be forgiven of our sins (Mat. 11:28-30).

The Bible Is The Authority in all matters of religion. The law of God is perfect, without flaw (Psa. 19:7). The inspired Word furnishes us completely (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Products of man contain errors, but the Bible is without discrepancies, it is truth (John 17:17; Psa. 119:89). The Bible is absolute (the same for everyone; all will be judged by its words (Mat. 24:35; John 12:48).

LOGICAL PROGRESSIVE STEPS IN KNOWING TRUTH

Please consider this simple illustration regarding determining the truth. From teenage years I have been partial to the 57 Chevy. My first car was a 57 Chevy, two door post, six cylinder, straight shift. Since that time I have owned, built and enjoyed six additional 57 Chevys. A couple of these I have diligently endeavored to restore them to near "original" condition. What was necessary to accomplish that task? First I had to determine what the original condition was by consulting the manual, the build sheet, and gathering all information available from the manufacturer. General Motors (Chevrolet division) was the authority. What I or others might have

“thought” did not matter. If it was to be in “original” condition, it was required to meet their standards. Original meant it was not to have disc brakes nor an alternator since these updates did not come on the original vehicle off the assembly line. The paint then was not up to the standards of today so original meant according to the pattern.

The same is true in religious matters. To return to New Testament Christianity, it is absolutely required to go to the authority – the sovereign God, the Creator of all things. Jeremiah correctly stated in the long ago,

O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (10:23).

Further in Proverbs 14:12 we learn:

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death.

The obvious conclusion is simple – we cannot direct our own steps and even if we foolishly tried, it likely would end in death. Thus, we turn to God’s way for salvation.

Consider the progressive steps to determine truth, the way that leads to heaven:

HEARING THE TRUTH. By seeking the Lord in His Holy Word we can learn the truth (Rom. 10:17). Man’s thoughts and ways will not produce the truth, but instead will produce a vain religion (Mat. 15:7-9). God’s Word is truth (John 17:17).

BELIEVING THE TRUTH. Faith comes from hearing this wonderful story of salvation (Acts 16:30; Mark 16:16). Without accepting the gospel of Christ,

we will die in our sins (Heb. 11:6; John 8:24).

ACCEPTING TRUTH / REJECTING ERROR.

We can “know” the truth by learning the will of God. We can “know” what is error (false, evil, commandments of men) as described in the Word of God (Mat. 15:7-9; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11). It is absolutely imperative that we follow truth and reject error in order to be saved eternally.

FULFILL OUR OBLIGATIONS according to the instructions in God’s Word. Consider the stark contrast between truth and error. God’s faithful servants must love, respect, hold to, defend, contend, and be set for the defense of the TRUTH (Phil. 1:7; Jude 3; 2 Tim. 1:13). Hear the Word of God concerning ERROR: we must not bid godspeed to another gospel (2 John 9-11); we must stop the mouths of false teachers (Tit. 1:11); have no fellowship with false doctrines (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:17) draw attention to the error and avoid them (Rom. 16:17).

WE CAN KNOW TRUTH

Previously in this chapter we noted that with evidence it can be determined what is genuine versus an imitation, counterfeit versus a U.S. Treasury bill. In matters of religion, we can absolutely, without doubt, determine the truth.

God has spoken (Heb. 1:1-2). His Word is truth (John 17:17) and we can know it and be made free from sin (John 8:32). Let’s put these thoughts to the test.

In Matters Of DOCTRINE, Can We Know the TRUTH? Let us take areas that are often discussed and

debated and come to a conclusion.

Question One: Are there many churches pleasing and acceptable to God? Is there just ONE church built by Jesus, which leads to eternal life in heaven? Are there not sincere, devout, and knowledgeable Christians in all denominations?

The evidence provided in Holy Scripture is absolutely clear. Jesus said He would build His church (Mat. 16:18). Salvation is only in Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:10). Only those who do the will of the Father shall be saved (Mat. 7:21). There is a narrow way that leads to eternal life (Mat. 7:13-14). There is one body (Eph. 4:4) and that body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23). There are ways that may seem right, but they lead to death (Pro. 14:12). Jesus said the religion of some was “vain” because they taught doctrines of men (Mat. 15:7-9). Yes, we can clearly see in God’s Word there is but one way, the way of Christ, is the church which Jesus purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28) that leads to heaven. We can (and must) know the truth about the church of Christ.

Question Two: Must one be baptized to have their sins washed away? Is it possible to KNOW for certain the answer to this question? Many would say we should not judge, but to obey God we must make a judgment. Note the evidence regarding baptism: Simple, clear, concise statements reveal baptism saves (1 Pet. 3:21); believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16); baptized to wash away your sins (Acts 22:16); repent and be baptized for forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38); immersed in water is baptism (Rom. 6:3-4); went down into the water to

be baptized (Acts 8:38-39); baptized where there was much water (John 3:23). From these passages, what “evidence” is abundantly clear to the honest student? Baptism saves, washes away sins, and necessary to have sins forgiven. Plus, baptism itself is immersion in water (not sprinkling or pouring a little water). We can (and must) know the truth about baptism.

Question Three: Is mechanical instruments of music in worship acceptable or sinful? Again, let the Bible speak about this important matter and we can accurately determine (judge) the truth on this question. Note the evidence: Christians at Ephesus and Colossae were told to “sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Paul wrote to the church at Corinth for Christians to sing with the spirit and understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). Additional passages are provided where they “sang” (Mat. 26:30; Acts 16:25). We are authorized in Scripture to “sing” unto the Lord. Further evidence reveals we are not to add to, nor take from, the Scriptures (Rev. 22:18-19; Deu. 4:2; Pro. 30:6). Since instruments of music in worship are not authorized by Christ nor the apostles, and since the early church did not include them in their worship – we would be doing what is not authorized in our worship to God. The evidence reveals that adding instruments of music in our worship would violate the principle of faith, void the Word of God, void God’s specific command and void the authority of Jesus Christ. We can (and must) know the truth about acceptable worship.

Question Four: Can we worship today in whatever manner we desire and please Almighty God? Can we add

various activities or actions that are not even mentioned in Scripture? Since God has not specified NOT to do certain things, surely it will be acceptable, correct?

Again, let's go to the Word of God. Go again to Revelation 22:18-19 and see that we are not to add to, nor take from that which is authorized. Let us emphasize as well that in Scripture we read of vain worship, will worship as well as true worship. Our Lord Himself said the worship of some in the first century was vain because they were teaching doctrines and commandments of men (Mat. 15:7-9). Just being religious is not enough. Just being sincere is not enough! We can know what God desires in acceptable worship. We can (and must) know the truth about worship.

In Matters Of MORALITY, Can We Know TRUTH? Consider for a moment the admonition of Paul to his son-in-the-faith Titus...

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12).

We surely agree that it is necessary to “judge” as we determine what is ungodliness and worldly lusts. Yet, there are many who quibble and argue over just what is sin!

Let's put a couple of areas to the test, by merely taking what the Bible says to determine the TRUTH regarding moral issues.

Question One: Can we determine with whom

we may have sexual relationships? In view of our government having legalized same-sex marriages, and since often God's people are told not to judge others in their choices – can we know what God desires and requires? The answer is YES! In Romans 1:26-32 Paul wrote to the Roman Christians on these matters:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their **women did change the natural use into that which is against nature**: And likewise also the **men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another**; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being **filled with all unrighteousness**, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that **they which commit such things are worthy of death**, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (emp. mine, ps).

God identified many sinful practices, including the sin of homosexuality. In the Old Law (Leviticus) we learn that such was an abomination to Almighty God.

Paul provided several sins in a list form in Galatians 5:19-21, and concluded that “those who do

such things shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.” In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, some of the Christians had been, but had ceased the ungodly practice of adultery and fornication. He added in verse 18 the words, “flee fornication.” Christ said (as recorded in Matthew 5:27-28) that we must not look upon a woman (other than our wife) to lust after her.

It is absolutely certain, by the evidence, what is allowed and acceptable by God in sexual matters. One man, one woman, united in marriage till death they do part, sexually meeting the needs of their partner (1 Cor. 7). Premarital sex is sinful! Extra-marital sex is sinful! We can (and must) know the truth about acceptable sexual activity.

Question Two: Is it possible to KNOW how we should live regarding money? Is greed acceptable? Will I please God if I am covetous of the things of others? Is it sinful to steal from others, especially if they are wealthy? Does the Bible provide adequate “evidence” for us to make an accurate judgment? The answer again is YES!

Listen to the Word of God: The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Thieves and covetous ones will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10). We brought nothing into this world and we will carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). Greediness and lasciviousness are condemned in Ephesians 4:19. Two great truths are emphasized by the physician Luke:

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15, emp. mine, ps).

While additional passages can be provided, surely this suffices to prove beyond doubt the TRUTH about this subject.

WE CAN KNOW ERROR

While in discussion with others, in matters of doctrines and denominations of men, some bold declarations are made: “Just believe what you believe and leave everyone else alone,” “Jesus said that we should not judge,” “There are many roads that lead to heaven,” “It is just your opinion, but we see the Bible differently.”

Does the Bible condemn an individual who is condemning another in what they religiously believe and practice? Should we just mind our own business?

First, examine what the Bible says about false teachers and doctrines of men: An abundance of passages contain warnings and admonitions about false teachers in the long ago, in the first century, and predictions which have been fulfilled in our time.

Some will not endure sound doctrine –

2 Timothy 4:1-4

Deceivers entered into the world – 2 John 7

Carried about with every doctrine – Ephesians 4:14

Deceitful who appear as angels of light –

2 Corinthians 11:13f

Evil men wax worse and worse – 2 Timothy 3:13

Ungodly men crept in unaware – Jude 4

Take heed to self and the flock – Acts 20:28-32

Ravening wolves in sheep’s clothing –

Matthew 7:15

Corrupt the Word of God – 2 Corinthians 2:17

Seducing spirits, doctrines of devils – 1 Timothy 4:1
Beguiling unstable souls – 2 Peter 2:14
Make God's Word of none effect – Matthew 15:6
Speak perverse things – Acts 20:30
Pervert the gospel of Christ – Galatians 1:7
Beguile with enticing words – Colossians 2:4, 8, 18
Pernicious ways, feigned words – 2 Peter 2:2-3

Second, listen to the Bible regarding our attitude and response to false doctrines:

Try the spirits to see if they are of God – 1 John 4:1
Not be carried away – Hebrews 13:9
Don't bid them Godspeed – 2 John 10-11
Withdraw yourselves – 1 Timothy 6:5
Have no fellowship with works of darkness –
Ephesians 5:11
Rebuke them sharply – Titus 1:13
Stop their mouths – Titus 1:11

Third, please answer the following questions:

- Is it possible to obey the above admonitions without making a judgment of truth versus error?
- Can we obey the commands of God's Word and remain silent about doctrines of men?
- What does it mean to "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1)? Does that not require a process of judging?
- In what way can we determine with whom we can have fellowship (Eph. 5:11)?
- What determines the TRUTH verses a PERVERTED GOSPEL (Gal. 1:6-9)?

- How can anyone ascertain the pure TRUTH versus a corrupted gospel (2 Cor. 2:17)?
- Is it possible to KNOW who is remaining faithful to the TRUTH and who is “carried away” (Heb. 13:9)? Is judging required?
- Were John (apostle of love), Paul (faithful soldier of our Lord) and Jesus Christ (God’s only begotten Son) unloving in their words and actions toward others? They boldly spoke against evil and false teaching.
- Are we unloving when we follow the examples of John, Paul and Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Pet. 2:21-22)?

Carefully examine the words of the apostle Paul as he admonished Timothy:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times **some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;** Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. **If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ,** nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather

unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore **we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God**, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. **These things command and teach** (1 Tim. 4:1-11, emp mine, ps).

After reading these inspired words, we ask, is it possible to harmonize the attitude of modern man in accepting everyone, judging no one, just believe and do whatever you think is right? What do we learn from these passages?

1. It is possible to depart from the faith (truth).
2. We are obligated to stand for, remind the brethren.
3. We must refuse false ways.
4. This is important and we must listen to the admonitions.
5. We must command and teach these facts.

Notice the specific plea of Paul in 1 Timothy 4:16:

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Paul esteemed Timothy highly and wanted the very best for him. Thus, he exhorted him to:

1. Take heed, be careful about the doctrine he followed and taught.
2. The doctrine of Christ is THE only powerful saving gospel (Rom. 1:16).

3. We must not deviate, change or pervert the doctrine of Christ.
4. By following the truth, we can save ourselves and others who we teach.

Again, listen to the inspired Paul, in his second epistle to Timothy:

This know also, that in the last days **perilous times shall come**. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; **Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away**. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, **Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth** (2 Tim. 3:1-7, emp mine, ps).

What do we learn from these passages?

1. Paul warns of men who will fall away from faithfulness to God.
2. They may appear godly, but they reject God's power and sovereignty.
3. They profess to hear and learn, but they do not accept truth.

Yet again, hear the pleas of Paul to Timothy,

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the

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

What do we learn from these passages?

1. Paul's charge is with God's authority.
2. The "Word" is truth and must be preached.
3. In preaching the Word, we will reprove, rebuke and exhort.
4. Some will not accept and follow sound doctrine.
5. Some teachers will turn from the truth.
6. Some will believe, follow and advocate "fables."

WE MUST CALL SIN, SIN!

If the Bible is the powerful saving message of salvation (and it is, Rom. 1:16), and therein is contained the words of eternal life (and it does, John 3:15; 5:39; 1 Tim. 6:12), and if submissive obedience to the will of the Father will save (and it will, Mat. 7:21), and if we are obligated to teach and spread the good news of Christ (and we are, Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15; 2 Tim. 2:2) – then we **MUST** speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth (Acts 20:27; John 6:68).

Being a faithful teacher of the gospel involves

pointing one to what is necessary to be saved as well as what one must NOT do in order to be saved. A faithful teacher will point others to what is RIGHT as well as what is WRONG. Examine again what Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:2-5:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort** with all longsuffering and doctrine. **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine**; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; **And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.** But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (emp mine, ps).

What do we notice in these passages?

1. The Word of God was to be preached, not the ideas, philosophies and doctrines of men.
2. Preaching the word involves REPROVE, REBUKE and EXHORTATION.
3. The reason for this is clearly given: some will not endure sound doctrine and will turn away from the truth.
4. To be faithful we must watch, be alert and guard against anything contrary to the gospel of Christ.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT SIN!

Sin is damning! In view of the fact established in Revelation 21:27 (“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 Lamb's book of life"), then our eternity-determining duty is to warn others of those matters that defile.

Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2)! God is pure, holy and good. Sin is a transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Sin grieves God.

Sin is not inherited! Ezekiel 18:20 states a child does not inherit the sin of the parents. We are free moral agents, having the power to choose good or evil (Deu. 30:19; Jos. 24:15).

Sin is progressive! One sin leads to another. David sinned in his sexual relationship with Bathsheba. Tragically David tried to cover it up, lied and ultimately was responsible for the death of Bathsheba.

Sin is THE problem of all mankind! All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). If we sin willfully, there remaineth no more sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 10:26).

Sin brings reproach (Pro. 14:34), makes one captive (Rom. 7:23-25), enslaves (Rom. 1:21-32).

Sin will find you out (Num. 32:23). It is impossible to hide from God (Psa. 139). Whatever we sow, we will reap (Gal. 6:6-7).

Sin is hated by Jehovah God! Certain sins are hated by our Creator (Pro. 6:16-19). He hates evil deeds (Rev. 2:6). Sin is an abomination to the Lord (Deu. 25:16). In the days of Noah the sinfulness of the world caused God to even be sorry He had created man (Gen. 6:5-7).

The Bible Is Clear And Bold In Calling Sin – SIN!

Galatians 5:19-21. The works of the flesh are explicitly given:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like... (vs 19-21a)

The summary given by Paul is beyond misunderstanding: “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven.”

Romans 1:18-32. The apostle Paul to the Roman Christians boldly condemned the sexual immoral actions of those who were filled with unrighteousness (v. 29). Men and women turned to sinful actions toward those of their own sex and God gave them up (vs. 26-27). God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against ungodliness and unrighteousness (v. 18). Some changed the truth of God into a lie and God gave them up (v. 24). Paul adds, “they which commit such things are worthy of death” (v. 32).

Colossians 3:5-9. Paul aggressively told the brethren at Colossae to mortify (kill, v. 5) the sinful actions of fornication, uncleanness, etc., because the wrath of God comes on children of disobedience (v. 6). In verses 8-9 he continues telling them to put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, lying etc. Paul did not mince words nor speak in vague terms.

Nathan to David. In 2 Samuel 12:7, Nathan figuratively pointed a finger at David and said, “Thou

art the man!” He told David he was the guilty, sinful one.

The Lord to the seven churches of Asia. John the revelator provides a record of the Lord’s words to seven congregations. The Lord told them He knew their works. He told some of the seven that He had somewhat against them. They were not living and working as required.

Paul to the Corinthians. Paul wrote at least two epistles to the brethren at Corinth. Included in these writings were strong rebukes and exhortations regarding sinful practices. He loved them, wanted them to be saved, thus it was mandatory to speak and seek to help them to be righteous.

Jesus’ words to the scribes, Pharisees and chief rulers. In Matthew’s account of the gospel record we find our Saviour speaking bold denunciations of these hypocrites, vipers, evil workers. While the Lord knew their hearts (and we do not), yet we can examine the fruit of others and know a thing to be good or evil.

Consider: if a child was playing outside, and you saw a rattlesnake close to the young one, would you just remain silent? Would you dare just go on about your business? Certainly not! With urgency you would seek to safeguard that little one. Maybe you would carefully scoop up the girl to protect her.

Likewise, if we know of an individual in sin, engaging in sinful practices, living a life that will definitely end in the torments of hell – dare we just leave them alone? Could our conscience be so seared as to just let them be lost in the fires of hell eternally?

With clarity, we must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and seek to help all ultimately reach heaven.

Conclusion

All judging is not wrong. The Lord said (John 7:24) to “judge righteous judgment.” John tells us to try the spirits (judge) to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1). Paul said to prove all things (judge) and hold fast to that which is good (1 The. 5:21). It is absolutely imperative to judge in order to obey the commands of God.

If we love others, we must speak the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) in love (Eph. 4:15), for the sake of the precious souls of men (Mat. 16:26).

Toxic Masculinity? Acting Like Men In A Feminized World

John DeBerry



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In search of a relevant definition of this politically concocted designation, I had no choice but to turn to the Internet. There, we find details of the fake news and fake terms that have yet to be well defined by conventional sources like “Dictionaries.”^{9*} Without effort, the expression, toxic masculinity pops up with a detailed discussion of its meaning and origin. I’m sure you have already surmised that some wayward group of academicians, with a progressive agenda, decided to give a name to one of the behaviors they seem to oppose... Men acting like men.

According to the Internet, the concept of toxic masculinity is used in psychology and gender studies to refer to certain norms of masculine behavior in North America and Europe. Norms that according to these psychologists are associated with harm to society and to

men themselves. Traditional stereotypes, they contend, “erroneously present men as socially dominant, which includes related traits such as misogyny and includes homophobia.” They assert that these masculine traits lead to violent behavior and are therefore “toxic.”

Well, interestingly, their point of view seems to say that all we know, teach and acquire as masculine behaviors hurts boys and men, and should be quickly and unceremoniously discarded. Their idea is that when men are abusive, sinful, disrespectful and dishonest, “it’s because of societies expectations, and the pressures of living up to those expectations.” It appears, from their lofty viewpoints that femininity is much less toxic; therefore, the more boys and men act like females the better men they will be. Those are strange and incongruent assumptions, considering that at the same time females are encouraged to take on and master these same masculine traits. Yes, they are therefore correct to surmise that there is a diabolical, hidden and disingenuous agenda neatly packaged within their progressive assertions.

TOXIC AND MASCULINE MAKES NO SENSE!

We’ve all grown up seeing and understanding the term “toxic.” We’ve seen it on kitchen and bathroom products, in hospitals, on the sides of chemical and fuel trucks and other places where there are hazardous substances. The word toxic describes something that is poison, risky, harmful and often lethal to human being’s and animals. We are also familiar with the “skull and

cross bone.” Symbol that usually accompanies the term “toxic or poison.” The expression, “Toxic masculinity” obviously is therefore intended to alter our perception of manhood and manliness. To make us believe that the norms usually associated with manly behaviors are concocted and unnatural. The belief is that little boys just want to be little girls, wear tutus and play with dolls and we force them into our preconceived male roll models harming them for life. With the advent of various popular movements, the word now, any expression or expectations, related to boys and men over the entirety of human history is suddenly suspect and offensive, toxic masculinity. While this concept is not brand new, today’s politically correct environment has spread it everywhere.

ONLY THE WORD OF GOD CAN BREAK THROUGH PROPAGANDA

As a shepherd, a minister, a father and a holder of public office, I consider it a privilege to approach these phenomena from the perspective of a child of God. God’s word is extremely capable of sorting through all the rhetoric, noise and mind mumbling propaganda thus revealing the calming music of truth.

Peter wrote,

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 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. 1:2-3).

According to Peter, God's word provides everything we need to navigate the affairs of life in an obedient and godly manner. Our lives, as men, are meant to bring glory to our Creator. It is He who created male and female and the strengths and virtues of each. According to Peter's first letter, we are, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Pet. 1:5).

Man, in his arrogance, assumes that he, not God, sets the boundaries, standards and norms of human **life and behavior**. Those who glory in the prefixes and suffixes attached to their names because of a few days in school, believe they have the skill and authority to recreate humanity in their own image. Unfortunately, their only concern is their own perverted viewpoints, summations, and conclusions. The word of God has been eliminated from the discussion. According to the apostle Paul, it is the supernatural knowledge and guidance of the Holy Scripture that helps us discern such matters. If men are to mature in God's service and be courageous in their behavior, the words of God, not those of men must guide us; "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Solomon, who was given unmatched wisdom from God states, "that the man who is pleasing in God's sight, he gives knowledge and joy" (Ecc. 2:26).

GOD CREATED MASCULINITY AND FEMININETY

The nature and roles of males and female were not

decided nor were evolved from the finite mind of social engineers, but the infinite mind of God. In his creation of the human race, it was God who made them male and female; “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). Moses continued writing, male and female created he them: and he blessed them and called their name Adam in the day when they were created” (Gen. 5:2).

There are those who ignorantly assert that little boys are totally and artificially given their masculine identity by society and little girls in like manner are assigned their feminine nature and behavior. The apostle Paul takes issue with these false doctrines. He states that each were created by God to serve him as God himself sees fit, “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man...”

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. Nevertheless neither is the man. without the woman, neither the woman without the man in the Lord (1 Cor. 11:7-9, 11).

According to Paul both genders, male and female, are strengthened by the other, and when each act according to their divinely assigned nature, they both bring glory to God. God has never placed limits on the natural abilities or attributes of either the man or woman or distinctions separating them in his family” (Gal. 3:28). We all stand equal before him.

However, God placed severe consequences on

disobedience, disloyalty and transgression (Genesis 3:14-19). God has also once delivered the faith, to the obedient in His kingdom (Jude 3).

GOD’S ASSIGNMENTS ARE NOT TOXIC OR DISCRIMINATORY

When you begin any discussion about the roles and behavioral diversity of males and females, the Bible will always be inevitably brought into the middle of the fray and blamed for the confusion. Usually those who want to diminish the role of men and embellish the role of women will attack God’s word as the short-sided originator of the inequity. They will accuse God of laws and policies which have; “enslaved females to the whims and ego of the males.” They blindly claim that all of the atrocities committed against the females of the species can be attributed to God’s antiquated laws about women. Of course, careful Bible study exposes this viewpoint as wholly untrue and contrary to God’s will and way.

REINVENTING MARRIAGE AND MASCULINITY

If the Devil is to be successful in his dismantling of God’s influence in society, he must first dismantle societies foundation, the family. To accomplish this, he must somehow disorient the man and the woman so that what God has assigned and ordained, is rejected and replaced. Adam was given the privilege of being the first to speak, prophecy, and in doing so, gave God’s explicit design for marriage.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him, (Gen. 2:18). And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:23-25).

God's plan for marriage being between one man and one woman for a lifetime, is evidently stated. Satan is well aware of God's intentions and design and has sought to compromise that design; our Lord Jesus Christ was tested by the Devil's devices and therefore firmly restated God's original purpose to the Pharisees. They knew this was a very contentious and controversial issue and were hoping that Jesus would misspeak so that they could accuse him of wrong. Our Lord proved very competent on the issue, and challenged them to return to God's instructions in the scriptures:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mat. 19:4-6).

While Jesus defended God's law, he also rebuked the Pharisees for allowing this issue of marriage to become so embroiled in controversy. According to verse

eight, the confusion originates within them by their refusal of God's commands, "But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men" (Mat. 9:8).

Now that the biblical standards, requirements and intentions of marriage are compromised in our society, the results are evident all around us as selfish, consuming and destructive, shallow, and ungodly relationships abound. Children are mostly being born out of wedlock, and consequently, often have no positive family structure. Every negative statistic, from juvenile crime, school drop out numbers, drug abuse, abortion, suicide and other unhealthy behaviors and decisions, can be directly attributed to the break down of the family. There is no way to have a strong, ordered and wholesome society without strong, wholesome families. Moses taught Israel that prosperity would be with them, as they stayed with God.

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it. That thou mightiest fear the Lord, thy God, to keep all his statutes and commandments, which I command thee, thou, thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey (Deu. 6: 1-3). And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house,

and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deu. 6:7-9).

MASCULINITY

Satan has been successful in the redefining of the family because he is successfully redefining masculinity. While there are those in the world raising girls as hard as nails, we are often raising boys as marshmallows.

The media has created and perpetuated the effeminate American male who is very in touch with his feminine side. Consequently, Hollywood has a shortage of male action stars; they keep recasting the same old, tough guys over and over. So, if you will take notice, most of the action, Hero Roles, are now women and the soft, screaming like a girl roles go to men. This is the new, non-threatening, non-abusive, whimpering masculinity that depends on the woman to feed and protect him and do all the fighting. What a bunch of garbage! The very expression toxic masculinity is an insult to all of us who do not buy into the reinventing of manhood by angry women and effeminate men. No where else on the planet are men encouraged to be soft, docile and withdrawing. The apostle Paul who conducted himself as a man in the midst of persecution, encouraged men to act like men, masculine, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). A man, a godly man, according to Paul is courageous and disciplined. His manhood does not

depend on strutting around like a peacock, but by leading his people, and walking humbly before God, (Phi. 4:1). As Paul taught in Romans 1:25, many have “changed the truth of God into a lie.” Also, strong Godly women are not searching for an effeminate man; they are searching for a man who will stand with God;

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel” (1 Pet. 3:1-2). For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Pet. 3: 5-6).

The Devil’s intent is to do to women today what he did to Eve; incite pride and competition in the male, female relationship.

SIN IS SIN

We must accept the fact that sin is sin, whether committed by the male or the female. God has never ever condoned violation of His will and law. As a matter of fact, our savior Jesus Christ, an individual of masculine gender not only serves as a male role model, but a model for humanity; Why? Because he refuses to sin. Paul stated in First Corinthians, that Jesus “knew

no sin” (5:21), therefore as the “sinless lamb of God, we are made righteous through and by him.” Peter expands on that concept showing Christ’s mission as the perfect example.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

We ask, how is it possible to accuse God, as the author of confusion, 1 Corinthians 14:33, when Christ gave such a clear, concise example? We can’t. The scripture teaches expressly that sin by males or females, is violation of God’s will and intent.

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him (1 John 3:3-6).

Both men and women are transformed by the word of God and the example of Christ Jesus. Sin is therefore not “gender specific;” for as Paul taught, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:23). It is God’s intent that mankind, both male and female, overcome sin. Even grace and mercy is no excuse to continue to practice sin, “What shall we say then?

Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Not only does Paul tell us to stop sinning, he also states that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

EVE TOOK THE LEAD FIRST

We have absolutely nothing in the entire scriptures that indicate that Eve was made inferior to Adam, while Adam had seniority, being made first, they were both given equal dominion over the earth;

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. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

Notice that each time God spoke of man's position and dominance, he used the personal plural pronoun, "them." God clearly revealed to Moses that the woman's original position was "help meet." God made man a helper, comparable and equal unto him as if "another self and counselor." Intellectually, spiritually and socially she was man's equal. This is why God included in the narrative how His relationship changed with mankind,

and that the events that led to that change were initiated by the female of the species and not the male;

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat (Gen. 3:4-6).

Satan surveyed the male and the female and then determined the subject of his seduction, his deception and his attack on humanity. Knowing the nature of Satan as the “father of lies,” (John 8:44), we know that he carefully observed the woman. Therefore Eve, by her own words, was compromised and misled, and the women said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13). Even after this heinous act of transgression which brought death on the entire human race, Eve still refused to accept responsibility. Her lack of humility is glaring as she shifts the blame to the serpent. Her strength and influence as a leader is obvious, she leads Adam into sin. Satan would have bewitched him first, if he thought he could, and scored an impressive victory against the “Federal head” of mankind (1 Tim. 2:14). On this occasion femininity overpowered masculinity as well as Godly obedience;

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). The Holy Spirit wanted it on record that the profound alteration of the man and the woman, as well as the

earth itself, was because of the female's high-handed and hard-headed transgression. God made no apology then, neither does He now, for the consequences of that sinful act. Adam's act of compliance to his wife's wishes is really inconsequential to the immediate curse for sin. Even if he did not eat, we all would still die. Eve was an equal representative of mankind, and the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20). The apostle Paul asserts that Eve's naive intent was not to disobey, but she was unable to defend herself, being weakened by pride, lust, and desire;

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy:
for I have espoused you to one husband, that I
may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But
I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled
Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should
be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ
(2 Cor. 11:2-3).

Satan proved to be a worthy and flexible adversary who used Eve's pride and defiance against her. He is doing the exact same today against those who refuse to submit to God's will and commands. With pride, not only are there those who refuse God's virtuous, courageous and vitally import role of the female, they also seek to alter, diminish and reappropriate the vitally important role of the male. Because of the tremendous power and influence of femininity, Satan uses it to tempt the entire world. John was told of the spirit, on the island of Patmos, of the Devil's continuing war against God through mankind:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old
serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which

deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Rev. 12:9).

In this passage, that John is to send to the seven churches in Roman Asia Minor, the Holy Spirit gives the adversaries character and motives. First, he is called, “the great dragon”, he is God’s sworn enemy, making him an evil and vindictive monster. He is rotten to the core and totally devoid of mercy. This very well fits Peter’s description of him as a “Roaring Lion” who stalks his prey with the intent of devouring them (1 Pet. 5:8). This monster had no mercy because of Eve’s naivety, neither does he hesitate to take advantage of the uninformed and the unrighteous today. Paul even warns that Satan was still in the lying and deception business, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:13-14).

After calling Satan a dragon, a monster, then the Holy Spirit connects Satan to the entire heart of the matter. “That old serpent, called the Devil.” Two names here directly tell all mankind why we have physical death. The name serpent reveals Satan’s diabolical fault in Eve’s seduction and mankind’s ultimate fall. Coming behind that, the name, Devil, shows him to be a slanderer, the accuser of all mankind. Then we see the universal result of his activity in the name Satan, the adversary, the opponent. He is the one who deceived the whole world (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 20:8).

The record will forever show that Eve took the

lead first, and because of her leadership, all of us die. Understand this, while God didn't diminish the woman's capacity for intelligence, reason, intuitiveness or leadership, His punishment was meant to profoundly fit the nature of the transgression. Eve's influence and power is clear, and she used that power against all of us. The consequence is not to change Eve's abilities, but to change her status. Eve had led Adam to step down and die with her; this was an assault on both God and Adam. God therefore is very angry at Eve for her leadership, and even more angry at Adam for his followship. Therefore, God appropriately diminished both of their standing on earth. Both would see their status altered. To the woman, her role as preeminent leader is taken away; "unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16).

God, also put pain where there was, by design to be no pain, and subordination where there was to be equality. God's reasoning was simple and contrite; if the woman will not be subordinate to one greater than herself, as punishment, I will make her subordinate to one equal to herself. God didn't remove the will or strength of femininity; however, it will forever require all of that will and strength to be pleasing to God, and for the female to save her soul. Let's be clear, God did man no favor in this episode, for not only did he place man in subordination to the earth, he gave man the lead, while before had not been assigned. Now man as leader, will have to display the masculinity traits, as leader, that

he had failed to deploy during the temptation. Now he will have to put his well being second to the well being of the woman and the family as a demonstration of what it means to be a man. God didn't put a saddle on the woman's back and spurs on the man's feet, as my dad used to say, but on the contrary, he requires that man act with courage, discipline and sacrifice. Jesus, as part of His mission demonstrated Godly masculinity. When Paul sought to demonstrate God's expectations of the male to the female he chose to use Christ's relationship to the church:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5: 22-25).

**BOTH MASCULINITY OF MAN
AND FEMININITY OF WOMAN
MUST YIELD TO DIVINITY OF GOD**

Before the apostle Paul speaks of the husband-wife relationship to Colossae, he reminds them that Christian virtues will be the foundation and anchor of the relationship. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

Then he gives admonitions for domestic tranquility

that basically teaches that God did not give the male the right to force submission but that the woman, in obedience to God, gives it. The male was not given the right to be harsh, abusive, or even combative (Col. 3:18-19). Men are taught to show masculinity as strong, faithful and sacrificial toward the female. The strength of masculinity is in God, not physical coercion. True masculinity, as we have demonstrated throughout the Bible, puts others first and is a protector of all. The female is not showing a lack of power, intelligence, or integrity when she submits to Godly, sacrificial men, she is actually showing obedience and discipline. It therefore behooves both women and men to look beyond physical attractiveness, stature and worldly traits when choosing a mate. Find one who has sought to prepare themselves for marriage by putting away “all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor and evil speaking with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). If you search or wait for a male or female who has done so, there will be no conflict between the attributes of masculinity and femininity. Consider the words of Solomon when the strengths of both are brought together as one:

Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:9-12)

“And cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh, (Gen. 2:24). God knew the weakness and virtues of both; he created masculinity and femininity to both to be part of something stronger than each individual part. Therefore, the “Three-fold cord” (Ecc. 4:12) could be considered a physical, emotional and spiritual bond that is not easily broken.

CONCLUSION

Let’s be frank, we know who is in control of the media and corporate America. We also know that there is a major push for all of us to accept, and become comfortable with the alternative lifestyle and gender choices. We see this in T.V. shows, commercials, movies, and even in the children’s programming. The progressives will make up new words, new expressions, new mindsets and then bully the rest of us, as though everybody thinks like them. “It’s a lie”; we are the majority and it’s time we started acting that way. Paul urged in the Galatian letter that the righteous take a stand in the hot bed of sin “Stand fast therefore in the liberty where with Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yolk of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). Paul urges us to maintain our national and spiritual freedom. We know the truth and we are liberated by the truth (John 8:32). The problem’s in America today are not the results of “**Toxic Masculinity,**” our thoughts are the results of “**Toxic Stupidity.**”

TOXIC MASCULINITY: ACTING LIKE MEN IN A FEMINIZED WORLD

Flat Or Spherical Earth? Evaluating Biblical And Scientific Evidence

Branyon May



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Introduction

While the idea of a flat Earth is not a new one, it has been recently revived into mainstream pop culture. For a variety of reasons, both secular and religious, many have adopted this view, or at least have begun looking to it as a viable explanation. For some, the arguments contrasting a spherical versus a flat Earth are confusing, and have caused internal frustration. This frustration has then lead to a sense of doubt towards previously accepted beliefs and facts.

Provide Consistent Answers

While we recognize many have struggled with this issue from both secular and religious viewpoints, we will be addressing the issue as it pertains to the Bible and Christianity. We will use two lines of reasoning to address this question, the Bible itself and scientific observations. With regard to the Bible, let us be clear,

the Bible is God's inspired word, it is without error, and it contains God's will for mankind. Therefore, we will take great care to address Scripture appropriately and consistently applying it within its context.

In support to the Bible, we have science as our means of studying the world around us, which provides a revealing of God's creative power. The diversity of regular functions and processes of nature allow us to perform repeatable observations and test predictions to deepen our understanding. Consistency is key when evaluating natural descriptions across a wide variety of phenomena. The descriptions for how and why natural events occur must be consistent and not contradictory across our entire understanding. Explanations in astronomy, meteorology, oceanography, geography, geolocation, ocean travel, air travel, space travel, structural engineering, laws of physics, etc, must all be interdependent and complementary.

So, what about humanity's understanding for the shape of the Earth? What does the Bible say about a spherical or flat Earth? What evidence does our own scientific observations provide? How consistent are our explanations across all of life's observations?

Biblical Perspective

As we read our Bibles, we first observe that an overarching purpose of Scripture is to establish God's providing presence for humanity and His principles to guide our lives. As God conveys these pillars of understanding to us, He also uses the descriptive power of history, law, poetry, and prophecy to reveal a

multitude of additional understandings important to our view of ourselves, our relationships, and our world. So when we seek to study a question about the “geometry of the Earth,” we do not view it as unimportant, but we do recognize that the Bible’s focus is not on conveying geometry but purpose.

Now for those promoting a flat Earth model from a biblical perspective, the claim is sometimes made that there are 75, 120, or over 200 verses “proving” the Earth is flat. This claim appears tremendous, especially when we acknowledge that God only has to say something once for humanity to accept it as true. So let’s start with the simplest question, “Does the Bible say the Earth is flat?” Does it use those words.

There are no verses containing the phrase “flat Earth,” or simply the words “flat” and “Earth.” Claims that the Bible teaches the Earth is flat do not come from any explicit statements. So what about implicit statements, maybe descriptive phrases? Here is where the various verses used in support of a flat Earth come into view. Phrases such as: “corners of the Earth;” “ends of the Earth;” “pillars of the Earth;” “foundation(s) of the Earth;” and “circle of the Earth” are given as evidence for God providing geometrical descriptions for Earth’s shape.

What about the “corners” or “ends” of the Earth?

In our English Bible the word, “corners,” is found in numerous verses. As we evaluate how these verses might apply to Earth’s geometry, it is interesting to first notice the one English word “corners” found in the

Old Testament is translated from at least 10 different Hebrew words (Strong's numbers: H678, H2106, H3671, H4740/42, H6284-85, H6438, H6471, H6763, H7098, H7106). In only a few of these Old Testament verses does the context actually apply to the physical aspect of Earth itself. Within these four verses, there are three different Hebrew words that have been translated as corners and ends:

Job 37:3 He sends it forth under the whole heaven, His lightning to the **ends (H3671) of the earth.**

Job 38:13 That it might take hold of the **ends (H3671) of the earth**, And the wicked be shaken out of it?

Isaiah 11:12 He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah **from four corners (H3671) of the earth.**

Isaiah 41:9 “You whom I have taken from **the ends (H7098) of the earth**, And called from its farthest **regions (H678)**, And said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away

From the diversity of Hebrew words translated “corners” and even in the limited contexts above, we can see various synonyms and concepts being stressed. The idea of a geometric, physical corner is not intended. Rather

the extent of God's supreme power and control is being expressed. Where does God have dominion? The answer from these verses is that He governs every portion and to every end that seems to be the farthest from home or the most secluded from humanity.

While some argue for a Flat Earth using these few scriptural references to "corners," the official Flat Earth Society addresses the question "Is There An Edge To The Earth?" by stating: "The Flat Earth Society, along with previous notable flatists such as Samuel Shenton and S. Rowbotham, believe there is no end to the Earth and that it continues indefinitely. The only edge to the earth is the one you are standing on" (FAQ). Here they describe the Earth as continuing indefinitely, describing what seems to be an infinite sheet.

A question to those who argue a flat-Earth view using the scriptural references to "corners" as proof: "How does an indefinite or infinite Earth have corners?" To compound the problem, Flat Earth maps show a circular region for Earth's navigable portion, so how can there be literal corners to a circular region all supposedly on an infinite sheet?

Flat Earth: Circle, Square or Box-shaped?

The majority of all flat Earth maps include a circular region for all of the land, water, and ice that composes Earth. So for those who wish to use the Bible's few references to corners as proof of its flat geometry, the question would be, "Is Earth circular or square?" If the response seeks to describe the Earth as comprising a circular region inside a square container, then is the

region outside of the circle also considered the Earth?
The Flat Earth Society states:

...the Earth is a round disk of indefinite dimensions. The geographic North Pole is located in the center of the disk, and the Antarctic lies around the outer edges (FAQ).

Some others have described the outer boundary as a type of ice wall that is an insurmountable barrier. However, if you were to use verses such as Isaiah 11:2 or 41:9 for their reference to corners, then you also have to address the fact that both of these verses discuss that people are called from the corners where they seemingly were inhabiting. To consistently use these verses to support a flat Earth, one must not restrict the Earth to be only a circular region. So the question becomes is the flat Earth a circle or square?

Yet, we must carry this question a bit further to ask whether the flat Earth is a circle, square, or box. Consider in Isaiah 11:12, where it provides the specific quantity of “four corners.” As we consider the flat Earth geometry, is the flatness truly flat? In other words, does Earth have depth? The obvious answer from many simple observations is, “Yes.” Dig a hole in your backyard and there is understandably a few feet of depth. Drill a water-well into the ground and several hundreds of feet are traversed. Descend into the Big Room of Carlsbad cavern and you will be more than 700 feet below the surface (“Explore the Cavern at Your Own Pace”), and if you were to travel down into Krubera (Voronya) Cave the lowest descent would reach over 1.3 miles below the surface (Klimchouk). Of course ocean

depths would also have to be included when considering the 3-dimensional depth. The Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench holds the record at a depth of almost 36,000 feet (6.82 miles) (“Deepest Part of the Ocean”). Now, what does the depth of the Earth have to do with flatness and corners? Well given that Earth cannot be truly flat or 2-dimensional, a flat-Earth shape would have to be some form of box, which means that there are more than 4 corners.

To re-emphasize that the Bible’s references to corners and ends of the Earth refers to God’s dominion over all of humanity no matter where on Earth they live, consider the following verse where the cardinal directions of North, South, East, and West are used in parallel with the phrase “ends of the Earth”:

Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your
descendants from the east, And gather you from
the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’
And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring
My sons from afar, And My daughters from the
ends of the earth (Isa. 43:5-6)

Scientific Perspective

The best way to work through this discussion is to consider the observational evidences. One of the most definitive ways to directly see the spherical nature of Earth is through the images taken from space by various space agencies. However, because many people who hold to a flat Earth have also expressed concern about government conspiracy theories, we wish to present the space-based observations after we discuss some simple

backyard-type observations. When considering new ideas a bit of healthy caution is good, but can become unhealthy when conspiracy and paranoia consume the conversation over the facts and observations. Using the laws of nature and physics that God set in place, let's investigate how we can know the Earth is in fact spherical.

Evaluating Observations of the Sun and Moon

Between flat-Earth and spherical views, the Sun and the Moon have drastic differences in physical characteristics and scale dimensions. The Sun's generally accepted location places it toward the center of Earth's orbit at a distance of approximately 93 million miles, with a physical diameter of 864,600 miles. In contrast, flat-Earth models describe the Sun as being 32 miles in diameter and orbiting above the surface of the Earth at a height of approximately 3,000 miles (Dubay, 89; Rowbotham, 74).

Since by observation the Sun and Moon have equivalent angular sizes, flat-Earth models must also place the Moon in an orbit coinciding with the Sun's orbit at a distance of 3,000 miles and having the same 32-mile diameter. Such scales for the Moon are vastly different than the Moon's generally accepted location in space, where it orbits the Earth at a distance of 238,900 miles and has a physical diameter of 2,160 miles.

We should also note that between these two views there is a vast contrast in distance between the positions of the Sun and Moon. In the flat-Earth model the two objects share similar planes of orbit, circling above

Earth parallel to the ground. Therefore, their physical distances from each other would fluctuate substantially depending on where in their orbits they were. At least once during every month's cycle the two would be physically very near to each other. By contrast, the standard heliocentric and spherical context describes the Moon's position in orbit around the Earth, where its distance from the Sun would keep approximately the same 93 million mile physical distance as Earth.

With such vast differences in scale, these models must also describe vastly different physical characteristics for the Sun and Moon, and in fact they do. Flat-Earth models describe the Sun and Moon in terms similar to spotlights moving above the Earth's surface, illuminating in such a way as to produce periods of day and night. Resulting from this description, flat-Earth models hold that the Moon is not reflecting the Sun's light but must instead be producing its own light. The physical characteristics of the Moon are therefore vastly different from the solid, rocky body and sunlight-reflecting surface usually discussed.

One simple observation would be to watch the apparent size of the Sun and Moon during their daily or nightly paths across the sky. In the flat-Earth model, the geometry of their distances from an observer on Earth changes drastically. What happens when an object's distance from you changes in drastic proportion to its usual distance? The object will appear larger or smaller. However, on a nightly basis the Sun and Moon stay exactly the same size. This continuity of size throughout each day and night cycle matches the spherical-Earth

model, as the Earth rotates and the Moon's distance over that 24-hour period is essentially constant.

When you then add in seasonal variations of the Sun and Moon's altitude and the corresponding temperature variation, the flat-Earth model explains this through changes in the size of the circular path above Earth. However, this additional change would cause not only the daily size variation but also a seasonal apparent size difference. The size of the Sun and Moon does not change seasonally, but rather in the spherical-Earth model their sizes are governed by their orbital distances and thus vary by only slight amounts.

Evaluating Observations of Eclipses

One means of testing these contrasting parameters is by evaluating eclipse events, where the Sun, Moon, and Earth experience well-defined and observable changes. First, the most obvious type of eclipse is a solar eclipse. In this type of eclipse the observed effect is for the New Moon to pass in front of the Sun eclipsing some or all of our view of the solar body. Due to the Sun and Moon having similar apparent sizes in the sky, a total solar eclipse can occur when the Moon's path precisely crosses the Sun. A total solar eclipse causes a daytime period of dramatic darkening, allowing the less bright outer regions of the Sun's atmosphere, including the chromosphere and corona, to become visible to observers. While these portions of the Sun's atmosphere are always producing light, their levels of emission are so much less than the extremely bright photosphere. Solar eclipses do not usually result in the total eclipse

orientation, but rather will occur more often as partial eclipses where only part of the Sun is obscured by the Moon. What information do eclipse observations provide? Eclipses demonstrate several important facts, which we will expand on below: (1) the apparent sizes of the Sun and Moon are approximately equal, (2) the distances from Earth to the Sun and Earth to the Moon are not equal, and (3) the spherical shape of Earth.

Eclipses provide for us an important understanding about the positioning of the Sun, Moon, and Earth. We see from the fact that the Moon passes in front of the Sun that the two bodies must be at different distances. During a solar eclipse when the Moon obscures the Sun, the Moon's distance is closer to Earth than the Sun's. When we couple this with the first important fact mentioned, that the apparent sizes are approximately equal, then we are able to also understand that the Sun and Moon must be different in their true physical sizes. If two objects were the same true physical size, then placing one of them farther from you would cause it to appear smaller. Thus, since the Sun and Moon appear the same size, then the Sun (which is farther away) would have to be larger than the Moon (which is closer) in order to appear equal in size. As we consider a difference in distance between the more distant Sun and less distant Moon to be greater and greater, the necessary size of the Sun must be larger and larger to result in an observed equivalent apparent size.

Now that we have established they are not at the same distance, we can also explore how solar eclipses also help provide evidence for the distance factors of the

Sun and Moon. A total solar eclipse occurs when the observer is located within the shadow cast by the Moon blocking the Sun's light. Consider the shadow cast on a wall by placing a round object in front of a light source. What happens to the shadow as the distance between the object and light source is decreased? Well the shadowed area becomes larger, and a viewer within the shadowed region would have to move farther to leave the shadowed area and lose this precise alignment. Now if the distance between the light source and object becomes larger, then the shadow that is cast on the wall will become smaller and subsequently the observer's location in the shadow for an eclipse alignment must become more precise (i.e., since the shadow is smaller, there is less area located within the eclipse shadow region).

Total solar eclipses are very rare events to see on Earth, which tells us that the alignment of such an event requires certain precision. It first requires precision for the orbits and locations of the three bodies to be exactly aligned, and second it requires that an observer be located within the area of the Moon's shadow cast on Earth. This second requirement increases the rarity of seeing a total solar eclipse, because the area of the Moon's shadow resulting in totality is small, at most only about 165 miles in diameter. The casting of a small shadow means there must be a significant distance between the Sun and Moon. In addition the path of totality, which is the track that the Moon's shadow takes as it moves across the Earth's surface, is a very narrow strip. When seeking to see a total solar eclipse event, the location where you go to observe must be very precisely chosen

within the track.

If we focus on the second major type of eclipse, a lunar eclipse, then we see not only further evidence for distances and orientations matching the heliocentric view, but also for the spherical nature of Earth. Lunar eclipses occur when Earth is positioned between the Sun and Moon, and its shadow is cast across the Moon's surface causing a darkening of the Moon. While solar eclipses only occur during the New Moon phase, lunar eclipses similarly occur only during the Full Moon phase. The precise alignment of the Sun, Moon, and Earth is emphasized by the fact that while lunar eclipses only occur during Full Moon phases, they do not occur every cycle and are quite rare. In contrast to a solar eclipse that involves one body, the Moon, obscuring the more distant Sun, a lunar eclipse involves the Earth's shadow progressing across the Moon's surface until it becomes completely engulfed.

The evidence for a spherical Earth comes from the fact that as the lunar eclipse event begins, the curvature of the Earth's shadow can be seen advancing across the Moon's surface. This provides direct observation for the circular shape of the Earth's body, as well as the required orbit of the Moon to go around to the opposite side of Earth from the Sun. Both of these observable facts are contrary to flat-Earth models, some of which postulate Earth as an indefinite plane or as a circular inhabitable region set in a rectangular block.

Observing Objects Outside of Earth

As we consider the shape of our own planet, we can

gain perspective by making direct observations of other celestial objects. By comparison of the physical features we observe in other objects, we can make application to the features we observe on Earth. A good starting place is to consider the planets in our own Solar System, objects that are generally the easiest to observe: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Each of these planets is described as being spherically round, so let's discuss the observational evidence.

The planets Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn are the four easiest of the planets to observe with simple backyard telescopes or even binoculars. With these tools the casual observer can see that each of these objects has dimensions and shape, showing more than the spot of light seen with the naked eye. In a simple description, the planets are obviously round, but are they three-dimensionally round objects? During short times of observing we are able to capture short picturesque views of the planets, but what happens as we continue our observations? If we simply make the effort to add repeated observations, we will be able to see the snapshot characteristics begin to show their dynamic and varying nature. With observations over a matter of days and weeks (even better over months), you will see Venus' phase change, Mars' apparent size and surface features change, Jupiter's rotation, and Saturn's ring orientation change.

Simple observations of the Moon and Sun in the sky clearly show a circular body. Couple this with a few observations and we can understand them as three-dimensionally round, as well. For instance, in similar

fashion to some of the planets, the Sun can easily be monitored over several days tracking visible photosphere features called sunspots, progressing across its surface. Sunspots are dark areas in the brightly visible layer of the Sun, called the photosphere. As we track a sunspot feature across the Sun's apparent surface, we find that shape and orientation of their entire context shows its movement to be caused by the Sun's overall rotation and not large atmospheric motion. Even small backyard telescopes with proper solar filters can be used to monitor the presence and movement of sunspots.

For the second brightest object in the sky, the Moon, our regular observations can be done even easier than trying to safely view the Sun. The most obvious observation of the Moon is that it progresses through a regular cycle of phases each month. As this cycle occurs, there is an obvious curvature seen in the visibly bright portion of the Moon. The shape of the Moon's phase, defined by the dark and light regions, is not caused by any shadowing from Earth. Instead the obvious curved shapes of a Gibbous or Crescent Moon are due to the overall spherical curvature of the Moon itself. As the Moon's position relative to the Sun's location changes, our view of the Moon's sunlit portion changes and we see the side of the Moon facing away from the Sun.

The direct relationship between lunar phases and the Sun can be seen by how each phase corresponds with the Sun's position, noting also that the phase of the Moon is approximately the same for every observer—evidence for the Moon having a large distance away from Earth. Flat-Earth models have the Moon located

quite close, and as such, the Moon's phase would be dramatically different based on where the observer is located. Instead, a Full Moon is always found opposite the Sun in the sky for every observer. When the Sun is setting below the horizon the Full Moon is rising above the horizon, and when the Full Moon is setting the Sun will be rising. Conversely, when the lunar phase is a New Moon, both the Sun and Moon will be seen in the same direction. The sunlit portions and the oppositely shadowed regions of the Moon are the visible results of the spherical shape of the Moon.

Even further as we gaze at the Full Moon, its varying surface features are obvious by the contrasting light and dark regions. Employ binoculars or a small telescope and you will have immediate access to a wealth of topographic variation: rough and smooth areas, large and small craters, elevated peaks and depressions. Focusing on the surface features we find that the shadowing effect that the phases provide enhances our understanding of the three-dimensional aspect of the Moon. The boundary line produced by the curved shadow across the Moon's surface (during the Gibbous or Crescent phase) is called the terminator. You will find as you observe the Moon that the terminator is a region of excellent viewing. Why, you might ask? There is a subtle decrease in the brightness of this region, allowing it to be somewhat easier on the eyes. The brightness difference is caused by the fact that the shadows of visible features along the terminator become lengthened as the terminator line approaches them. First, this is one piece of evidence toward the Moon not producing

its own light, as some flat-Earth proponents suggest (Dubay, 78-81), but rather reflecting light from an outside source (the Sun). Second, the shadows become extended when features are near the terminator, showing to a greater degree a contrast in height above the lunar surface. Here we can begin to identify the differences between elevated and depressed features by where their shadow is cast. The Moon is a distant, three-dimensional body with a variety of topographic landscapes.

Evaluating Observations of the Constellations

As we view the night sky and trace out familiar patterns in the stars, we can begin to map out the constellations. It is these consistent arrangements of stars that provides our view of the heavens a sense of mapping and charting. We can use the positions of constellations relative to other stars and constellations to help us determine not only where lesser known and less obvious celestial objects are located, but to help us here on Earth to navigate our own geography.

Similar to how Earth's geography has been mapped through history to provide our current knowledge of how the major landforms are oriented, the entire sky has likewise been mapped to give us a relation for how each constellation is oriented and located relative to the others. Following the same process for how Earth's maps were compiled, requiring not only exploration but a combining of knowledge from many diverse groups across the world, the constellation map of the sky has been compiled from astronomical observers from different regions of the Earth over long periods of

time. This process of combination was not only a good arrangement but was necessary for a complete map, since the available view of the sky is dependent on your location on Earth. Observers in different locations will have different views not only for similar times of night or seasons, but also may have access to view constellations not available to other regions.

First, the view of a single observer varies seasonally. The visible constellations follow a regular cycle throughout the period of a year, then repeats the same exact cycle the next year, and every year after that. What this seasonal cycle illustrates is that for any single location, there will be constellations that can be viewed during the winter months but that are not visible during the summer months, and vice-versa. This variation means that the Sun's position in the sky is independent of the star and constellation positions, and thus there must be two motions in process to account for the Sun's position and the constellation positions. The fact that there are seasonal variations seen in the East to West changing of visible constellation positions supports the spherical curvature of Earth and its rotational axis motion that impacts the star's positions.

Second, there are constellation variations based not only on seasonal changes but on the geographical locations of observers. If we consider different observers located in the midwest United States, in central Africa, and in Australia, we find that each will have dramatically different observations. The set of constellations visible will be very different for locations with large North-to-South separations, where many constellations will not be

visible from the opposite location. Constellations that may be visible from two locations with smaller North-to-South separations will still have very different apparent positions in the sky. Thus the stars and constellations visible at a particular location correspond directly to an observer's latitude, where observers located at dramatically different latitudes will have unique views. These variations show us that there is a North-to-South curvature of Earth, which is aligned with a preferred axis of East-to-West rotation. A flat-Earth model is not able to describe these observations, where a spherical Earth provides a simple description for how they occur.

These observable facts make clear sense for a spherical Earth, as the relative positions on the globe would determine your outward facing view of the sky. Other regions of the sky are obscured by the curved body of Earth. The reason that some constellations may be completely unique based on your location, results from Earth's globe having a rotating motion about its axis. Where an observer is located on the surface, relative to the axis of rotation, will define what regions of the sky may or may not be visible and which stars are circumpolar (meaning they circle the celestial pole and are continuously above the horizon). The nearer you are to one of Earth's poles (North or South), the less of the total sky you are able to see. A person south of the Equator will never see the North Star, Polaris (located at the North Celestial Pole). A person north of the equator at latitudes greater than about 26 degrees will never see the Southern Cross (near the South Celestial Pole). This location-dependent view is why Australia

and New Zealand have this prominent group of stars on their nation's flags, but Northern Hemisphere nations do not.

Flat-Earth models have huge complications when trying to describe how the visibility of constellations varies based only on an observer's latitude. Problems are further compounded when addressing the observations of completely different constellations visible to those located at far northern and far southern latitudes, and that there are not one but two celestial poles around which stars rotate.

Evaluating Geography, Geolocation, and Travel

In terms of geography, all flat-Earth models I have seen orient the center of Earth as the North Pole and then spread out the continent landforms in a circular orientation, ending with the icy-continent of Antarctica around the outer edge. While complete exploration of Earth is beyond most, we can apply implications to this arrangement of the geographical map. First the distances around a given latitude increase from very near the North Pole all the way to the very large diameter at Antarctica. In contrast, the globe geographic map has increasing latitude circles toward the equator and decreasing toward the poles. The contrast in distances, then, is very great as you consider distances and travel from the southern regions of South America to the southern regions of Africa to the countries of Australia and New Zealand. The physical distances along lines of latitude between these points are multiple times farther than their corresponding latitudes near the North Pole.

Considering also how longitude lines would be oriented on flat-Earth map versus a spherical Earth, we can see how the longitude lines continue to increase in their distances from one another as you move toward Antarctica. On a spherical globe the longitude lines converge together at the poles. Again there are drastic differences between these geographies, especially in the Southern Hemisphere. Australia for instance sits roughly between the 115° and 150° E longitude and 15° to 35° S latitude. So to match this on a flat-Earth map means that Australia has to be much wider proportionally than the corresponding area north of the Equator (across the Philippine Sea).

If we evaluate the geographical distances as they apply to travel, then we can add the human factor to the contrasts between flat and spherical models. First for circumnavigation by sea, the flat-Earth model results in immensely longer distances along the path around the horn of Africa and around the tip of South America as Magellan traveled in the 16th century. Through the centuries since, many expeditions have completed circumnavigation by sea in a variety of vessel types and following different paths. The earliest of these expeditions were also explorers traveling in uncharted waters, but since that time the navigation has depended on the precision of mapping and distances to push the limits of shorter and shorter completion times.

Modern air travel adds another layer of contrast between flat and globe. The shortest distance between any two points on a flat surface is a straight line. However on a spherical globe, while the shortest

distance still travels directly between endpoints, the flight coordinates would appear as a curve on two-dimensional representation. So when flight paths for modern airlines are visualized on a 2D view, the paths appear to curve and cross land that doesn't fall directly between the endpoints. The differences between flight paths for the flat and spherical models not only includes differing distances, but maybe even more importantly very different flyover geography. Take for instance flights from South Africa to Brisbane, Australia. On a flat-Earth map, the straight-line flight path would take you over the continent of Africa and over Asia. However, on a globe you would fly mainly over the Indian Ocean. Now if the claim of conspiracy was used, that the airlines wanted to simulate the same ocean flyover one would expect from a globe, then they would be substantially increasing flight time and distance curving around the long outer region of the flat-Earth map. Plus, this same scenario would have to be used by every airline company in every country for every flight with differing globe to flat flyover geography.

Evaluating First-Hand and Photographic Evidence

First-hand Evidence

In 1961, the Soviet Union shocked the world by sending the first man into space, Yuri Gagarin. This was not only the first manned flight into space, but the first to orbit Earth. Since that time more than 500 professional astronauts representing 40 countries have traveled into space as pilots, commanders, or

crew members of manned spaceflight programs (“List of Astronauts by Name”). The three countries from which these astronauts have been launched include the United States, Russia (previously the Soviet Union), and China. It is important to note for those who might consider conspiracy theories that over the years of space travel, the three countries providing the launch abilities have had tentative and even hostile relations. Yet, even though the over 40 countries who have sent astronauts into space disagree on politics, religion, and economics, their recognition of a spherical Earth that is able to be orbited and studied is consistent.

Each of these countries have been fortunate enough to send select men and women to space as **first-hand observers** and scientists to gather data from above the Earth’s atmosphere. With more than 50 years of time and over 500 first-hand observers from over 40 countries, the view of Earth as a majestic globe has not been refuted or even brought into question by these individuals. While others may claim a flat-Earth view, their arguments do not include spaceflight testimony from first-hand observers.

Photographic Evidence: Full-Disk Imagery

While there are many amazing and beautiful images of our Earth provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), we want to first focus on the photographic evidence available from numerous international sources. The following collection of photographic evidence only includes imagery from full-planet views of Earth. Please notice the sources of

these images come from a range of satellites, operated by different countries with sometimes different scientific objectives.

Let's begin with photographic evidence from Japan. The currently operating Himawari-8 satellite overseen by the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) is currently taking full-disk images of the Earth every 10 minutes, focusing on the region of Japan and its neighbors to the South (<http://www.jma.go.jp/en/gms/smallc.html?area=6>). Also the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) captured a full-disk view from the Hayabusa satellite (http://www.isas.jaxa.jp/e/snews/2004/0519_new.shtml). This satellite's main mission was to study the comet Itokawa, but was able to image the full-disk of Earth from a distance of over 180,000 miles away.

Next photographic evidence comes from the currently operating ELEKTRO-L series of satellites launched by the Russian space agency, Roscosmos (<http://www.russianspaceweb.com/elektro.html>). These geostationary satellites are designed to take meteorological images and monitor weather conditions. The ELEKTRO-L2 satellite is positioned over the Indian Ocean and transmits regular images every 30 minutes.

From India, we have photographic evidence from the INSAT-3D geostationary satellite, managed by the India Meteorological Department (<http://satellite.imd.gov.in/insat.htm>). Launched in 2013, this satellite is designed for meteorological observations of land and ocean for weather forecasting. New full-disk images are

regularly relayed to Earth approximately every half-hour.

From a cooperation of numerous European countries, the Meteosat Second Generation (MSG) satellites take full-disk observations. Operated by the EUMETSAT (European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites), the Meteosat satellites are in geostationary orbits 22,300 miles above Europe, Africa, and the Indian Ocean. New images are taken every 15-minutes in visible and infrared wavelengths (<https://www.eumetsat.int/website/home/Images/RealTimeImages/index.html>).

Launched in 2010, South Korea successfully placed into orbit its first geostationary satellite, COMS (Communication, Ocean and Meteorological Satellite). Managed by the National Meteorological Satellite Center, the COMS satellite takes regular full-disk images (http://nmsc.kma.go.kr/html/homepage/en/chollian/choll_info.do).

From China, we have photographic evidence from the unmanned Chinese lunar explorer Chang'e 5. The test module took this photograph on November 9, 2014 at a distance of 336,000 miles above the Earth's surface (<http://www.planetary.org/multimedia/space-images/earth/earth-and-the-moon-from-change5t1-2.html>)

Lastly, we will add the photographic evidence taken by the United States. Decades of space travel and many diverse projects have been able to take full-disk images of our planet. Going back to the early Apollo missions (1961-1972) aimed at traveling to the Moon, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronauts were able to take first-hand photographs on

film. Later in 1990 as it began its mission to Jupiter, NASA's Galileo spacecraft took an image back toward Earth from a distance of about 1.5 million miles (<https://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA00076>). In 2015, the joint effort of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), NASA and the United States Air Force launched the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSCOVR). Located one million miles away, this satellite maintains the nation's real-time solar wind monitoring in order to facilitate alerts and forecasts for geomagnetic storms caused by solar flares and coronal mass ejections (<https://www.nesdis.noaa.gov/content/dscovr-deep-space-climate-observatory>). Different from geostationary satellites that continually maintain the same view of Earth, the DSCOVR satellite will be able to image all of Earth. Being located between the Sun and Earth, it will be able to watch the fully illuminated Earth rotate, imaging all sides of the spherical Earth.

CONCLUSION

While we did not consider many other evidences such as Earth's magnetic poles, GPS triangulation and satellites, Coriolis effect, time zones, distant horizon curvature, and Arctic and Antarctic exploration, we were able to evaluate numerous easily accessible observations: from the Sun, Moon, planets, and constellations, to evaluating geography and travel, to the consideration of modern first-hand and photographic evidence. From such a scientific evaluation, we can see for ourselves the contrast between flat and spherical Earth models,

and the consistency provided by the spherical Earth explanation for the wide variety of observed phenomena. When we turn the Bible and evaluate the flat-Earth claims for various passages, we can see the inconsistent and forced interpretation. While there are clues to the overall geography and geometry of Earth in Scripture, the overarching purpose is to focus on God's plan and purpose for His people.

Though there exists a wide diversity of backgrounds and motivations to believe in a flat Earth, one underlying common need for this viewpoint is large-scale conspiracy. For explanations to be plausible, a conspiracy to deceive must exist. However, when we evaluate all of the different areas from biblical to scientific to political to basic everyday observations, we find that the conspiracy would not only have to include government at all levels: local, state, national, and international, but also private industry of all kinds: telecommunications, airlines, shipping, electronics, manufacturing, news, publishing, weather, education, travel, etc. Not only would the conspiracy include all aspects of modern life, but it would also have to span centuries past.

In this day and age of readily available information, sometimes just enough "truth" can be given to allow an idea to be plausible and believable in one's mind. Sometimes an idea is given more credence because of who espoused it, than what it says. Other times, it might take hold because of a rebellious attitude against the long-term understanding. Whatever the reason a person has for believing something, we must look

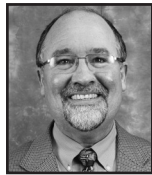
for consistency in Scripture and consistency through common-sense application in everyday life.

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If A Man Doesn't Work, Neither Should He Eat: When Helping Hurts

Tim Kidwell



Tim Kidwell has been married to Robin for 39 years, and together have three daughters; Holly McCormack, Autumn McBrayer, and Reagan Kidwell, and they have eight grandchildren. Both of his sons in law are Gospel preachers; Jon McCormack and Matthew McBrayer. His father and grandfather were gospel preachers, as well. He is a graduate of Freed Hardeman University. Tim has preached full time for thirty nine years. He has done local work in AL, AR, MD, FL, TX, GA, and MO. He has taught at the Bible Institute of Missouri. Tim has been involved in fifteen mission trips to Guyana, South America. He has worked with the Branson Church of Christ in Branson, MO, for the past nine years. He also serves as an elder.

Most every person who has been involved in the area of benevolence within the church has heard the following remarks or something similar in meaning;

You are a church.

You are supposed to give us groceries.

You are supposed to put gas in my car.

You are supposed to put me up in a motel.

You are supposed to help me with my utility bills.

You are supposed to pay my medical bills.

You are supposed to buy diapers and formula for my baby.

You are a church; you are supposed to help!

You call yourself a Christian?

It would seem that a large number of requests/demands for help come from people who willingly make decisions

that bring hardship upon themselves and other family members. They then expect someone else to provide for their needs. Many times this is attempted by concocting a story based upon an emotional appeal. Churches, because of their benevolent reputations, are at the top of the list to obtain assistance by those who have genuine needs, as well as the professional beggar. Many brethren who have assisted those “in dire straits” have experienced the reality that the one helped had been dishonest in the facts concerning their difficulty.

HELPING THE POOR

What Has God Commanded?

One does not have to look far into the pages of God’s word before they discover that assisting the needy was a command under the Old Law.

If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs... You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land’ (Deu. 15:7-11).

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God (Lev. 23:22).

He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,
But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy
(Pro. 14:31).

Assisting those with a physical need is also commanded in the gospel of Christ.

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do (Gal. 2:10).

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 20:35).

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:27).

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (Jam. 4:17).

Concerning the poor, Jesus said, "For the poor you have with you always" (John 12:8). This is proof that no matter what man tries, poverty will never be eliminated. Just as there will always be a need to share the gospel of Christ to the spiritually destitute; there will always be people in the world who are in need physically. Those

truly seeking to serve and please God will be benevolent towards those in need. Benevolence is not just the act of assisting. It also involves our attitude. A person can do a good thing with a bad attitude. To rightly practice benevolence is to extend kindness towards another because we are motivated by compassion. More than a dozen times New Testament scriptures reveal that Jesus taught and practiced compassion. If we are imitators of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1), we will do likewise.

POVERTY IN BRANSON, MISSOURI

In preparation for this writing I gathered the following statistics concerning poverty in my hometown. While these figures will not be exactly the same for every community, the percentages given are probably very similar. This information was reported at the 2019 S. Truett Cathy Poverty Summit. This conference was conducted February 1, 2019, at the College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri.

Population of Branson, Missouri:

- a. 10,500 (as of 2018).
- b. More than 2000 people live in motels. These individuals are not counted in the census.
- c. Over 500 of the people living in motels are children.

Low Income Housing:

- a. In 2005 there were only two extended stay motels in the city.
- b. There are currently more than forty of these weekly/monthly type motels.

- c. Because of city health code violations, several of these type motels have been shut down and many others face the threat of closure if they do not make improvements required by law.

Local Soup Kitchen Report:

- a. In 2009 more than 11,000 meals were served.
- b. In 2018 more than 62,000 meals were served.

Disability Statistics in Branson, Missouri:

- a. Of working age people, 9.1 percent are on disability.
- b. Nationally, homes with two or more drawing disability assistance rose from 525,000 in the year 2000 to 850,000 in the year 2015.

Average Income:

- a. The average hourly wage paid in Branson, Missouri, is \$10.
- b. If a person works 35 hours per week at \$10 per hour they will earn \$1400 per month, less taxes.
- c. Because much of the work in Branson is tourist related and therefore seasonal (9-10 working months per year), the average income is only slightly higher than the individual who stays home and receives SSI (Supplemental Security Income).
- d. When disability is added from one or more people in the household, many people receive more money to stay home than if they

- actually worked.
- e. Single women are rewarded for becoming unwed mothers by receiving more financial benefits than the married mother.
 - f. Over the past 10 years in Branson, Missouri, there has been a dramatic increase in request for assistance from single women with children. (Is there any wonder why?)

Categories Of Poverty In Branson, Missouri:

- a. Approximately one third who seek financial assistance have a disability.
- b. One third are dealing with adversity (i.e. job loss, repairs needed on home or vehicle, medical bills, etc).
- c. One third have chosen the lifestyle of financial dependence upon others because of an addiction to alcohol or other drugs.

Based upon this preacher's experience there should be another category averaged into these statistics; some people are just lazy! And our government programs, in many instances, reward laziness and irresponsibility. This element makes discernment between the afflicted and the opportunist more challenging for those who are desirous of assisting persons truly worthy of help.

**IS ASSISTING SOMEONE
WITH A PHYSICAL NEED
ALWAYS PLEASING TO GOD?**

While aiding the poor is a command from God,

financial hardship does not equate to automatic assistance from the Christian. What has caused this person to fall upon hard times? Certain qualifications must be met by the recipient before aid is approved/required by our Lord. A good steward of God's money will strive to use proper discernment in disbursing His funds. This will require investigation into the request. (More will be said concerning that process later in this writing).

Laziness Should Not Be Rewarded.

Of the Christian's work ethic the apostle Paul wrote, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). Those seeking to please God strive to follow the admonition of Solomon; "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ecc. 9:10). There will be no space occupied in heaven by a lazy Christian.

In consideration of a request for assistance it should first be understood that a person who chooses not to work, has also chosen not to eat. Emotionally this may seem harsh, but physical consequences are a vital part of spiritual growth. Solomon wrote, "Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger" (Pro. 19:15). Regarding this principle the apostle Paul taught, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 The. 3:10). God's word plainly teaches that it is wrong for a person to choose to be in poverty; therefore, it is also wrong for others to help the lazy to be comfortable in their

sinful lifestyle.

Did you give the individual on the corner food, money, clothing, etc.; because there was a need which God would have you meet? Or, did you just soothe your conscience because emotionally you felt badly for the person's physical appearance (or circumstances they claimed as written on the sign which they held in their hand)? Did you give the person who came by the church building \$20 for gasoline because it was a proper use of God's money? Or, was it just the quickest way to be rid of an uncomfortable solicitor? Are we helping people to seek God, or are we helping people to be comfortable in their sin?

The Christian's First Obligation Concerning The Needy:

A Christian's first obligation is to assist those in need who are part of his Christian family. The apostle Paul wrote; "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Sadly, some brethren seem to think this means to be especially hard on brethren who have a need. They are quick to give financial assistance to the panhandler who stands on the corner or comes by the church building (a few dollars will send them away). But those same brethren are very skeptical when it comes to assisting a brother or sister in the congregation. They begin to scrutinize by asking/saying;

- a. Why are they in financial distress?
- b. Have they brought this predicament upon themselves by foolish decisions?

- c. What is their plan to avoid this problem in the future?
- d. They will probably always be one of our “high maintenance” brethren.

Discernment should be used in **all** cases! Questions to identify problems and supply solutions are appropriate. But do we ask the same questions of those from the world who have their hand extended? Are we as quick to give our brother the benefit of the doubt as we are to help pay the utility bill of someone from the world we just met? We are to help all in need, but especially those who are Christians. Does most of our benevolence budget go to assist those in need who are of the household of faith? If not, are we in compliance to the command of especially helping Christians?

Brethren helping brethren is evangelistic in nature. It calls attention to godliness and therefore to God. The apostle John wrote; “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him” (1 John 3:17)? Jesus taught, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Physical Assistance For a Brother Can Be Sinful.

There are circumstances when God requires that physical assistance be withheld from a brother or sister in Christ. In those instances to give physical assistance would actually cause spiritual harm.

The parable of the Prodigal Son, recorded in chapter 15 of the gospel according to Luke, is familiar

to most people with even a small amount of Bible knowledge. In this parable Jesus tells of a father who had two sons. The younger son asked the father for his part of the inheritance. This was not an unusual request in their culture. After receiving his share, the younger son went into a “far country” (vs. 13) and spent all of his inheritance on wasteful and depraved living. Soon after “going broke” the young man began to starve and could only find employment feeding pigs. Jesus said the young man was so hungry he even considered eating the swine’s food. It was not until he reached this point of desperation that the son felt sorrow for his sinful decisions and decided to go home and ask for his father’s forgiveness. The young man felt his actions were so bad that his only chance for forgiveness from his father was to return home and serve him as a slave, instead of a son. Because of the young man’s penitence, the father forgave him and restored him to full fellowship as a son which included all the blessings of a faithful child.

Part of this story, quite frequently overlooked and yet very important, is found in verse 16. Before the young son repents he finds himself in a pig pen. He is in desperate physical need and still Jesus tells us, “no one gave him anything”. No one gave him money. No one gave him food. No one gave him shelter. No one gave him clothing. No one gave him anything! “No one” includes even the young man’s family. We might be tempted to defend the family by saying, “They could not have known of the young man’s condition because he had gone into a far country” (vs. 13). It

is true that this son wanted to be out from under the control and influence of his father and therefore chose to be where he felt he was beyond his father's reach. You may recall, however, that the older brother knew exactly where the younger brother had been and the sinful activity in which he had engaged (vs. 30). More important, the father in this story represents God who is all knowing. Because of this, we must also understand that the father (representing our Heavenly Father) was aware of his son's location and circumstances, but chose to let him suffer the consequences of his sinful decisions. He longed for his sons return home, but he did not try to force him or lure him home. The father knew the son would not desire to live at home under his rules of conduct until the young man "came to himself".

Do you think the son would have wanted to return home if his father had helped him to be physically comfortable in his sin? Of course not! The son was enjoying the blessings that were available at home at the time he made the decision to leave. He also knew those blessings remained available to anyone his father accepted. It was not until the prodigal son "came to himself" (vs. 17), (repented and displayed godly sorrow, 2 Cor. 7:10), that the blessings available from his father were desired by him.

Helping those who choose to live in sin to be physically comfortable in their sinful state will not cause obedience to God to become more desirable in their eyes. Those who have experienced the blessings bestowed upon God's faithful children, and still choose to live a life of rebellion, cannot be "niced"

back home. Until they experience the consequences of their decisions, coming home to live by God's commandments will not be attractive to the ones choosing to live in darkness.

How many friends and family members have aided those living in the far country by claiming they are only expressing love and "keeping the door of communication open"? To those who choose this avenue I ask; "How has that worked out for you?" Is your loved one any closer to repenting now (because of your fellowship and support) than they were the day they chose a life of sin? How many weeks, months, or years have passed? Is your situation the exception to our Lord's rule? God promises to assist those who put Him first (Mat. 6:33). Do you love your child more than God loves His? Are we not to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1)?

Withholding physical assistance to a loved one in need is a very emotional circumstance which makes obedience to God's instruction difficult for the spiritually immature. But let us remember that God's way is always best even if it disturbs our emotions (Isa. 55:8). Many who have loved ones living in the "far country" refuse to imitate God and, therefore, enable the lost one to continue in sin. Sadly, most of those in the far country will remain there. Why come home when the comforts of home are being supplied by those who live at home?

How desperate is your loved one to return home? What will you make available to them when they return that they are not receiving from you presently? "And no one gave him anything."

WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

There is a secular organization in Branson whose purpose is to assist the needy. They proclaim; “We can love people, serve people, even educate people, but the only thing that will move people out of poverty is employment.” The following Chinese proverb is referenced by them to promote their efforts; “Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

This is not always true, especially among many of those who have come to exist by relying upon the goodwill of others. Without proper motivation, education just produces an intelligent sluggard. Physical relief for those in need will always be temporary if that person has no desire to please God. And obviously the desire to please God requires the knowledge of God. That element will always be missing in the efforts of those in the world. Only the church has the ability to provide the means for everlasting assistance.

THE PROCESS

Proper Attitude

True benevolence is only experienced if a person has a compassionate heart. When the opportunity to do good is presented, what is your attitude? Do you see a soul who Jesus went to the cross to save from their sins? Or do you immediately judge the person to most likely be unworthy of help? Granted, the professional panhandlers have challenged our ability to be very sympathetic. But the Christian still must judge righteously and not by appearance (John 7:24).

Our goal in giving financial assistance to another should be to bring glory to God. Ultimately this would include trying to share the message of the cross with that person. Am I truly interested in trying to create an opportunity to teach this person? Or am I willing to go through the motions of caring as I inwardly hope the process will not take much of my time or effort? Am I treating them the way I would desire to be treated (Mat. 7:12)? True benevolence requires compassion.

Due Diligence

All that we possess belongs to the Lord. Christian stewardship demands that we use what we have for the purpose of glorifying the Lord. It is just as wrong to not use our money for good; i.e. dig a hole and hide our money in the ground (Mat. 25:24-27) as it is to waste it on sinful living (Luke 15:13). Many elderships will give an account for the large sums of money that will be burned up on judgment day because it was being "saved".

A good steward will desire to use the Lord's money, but use it wisely. In the area of benevolence; due diligence involves inquiry. If I do not know the person requesting assistance they should not be insulted when I inform them that I must try to confirm their information. After all, they are asking for a portion of that which belongs to the Lord.

The following are questions and procedures we use in trying to perform due diligence concerning the motive of the person requesting help.

1. Sadly, there are many evil people who prey upon the benevolent nature of churches. It is not unusual for the “professional” solicitor to be on the run from the police. If I am contacted by telephone, I inform the caller that I may call the police to perform a background check. Many choose not to show up upon learning that is part of our process.

2. Always make a photo copy of the requester’s ID. Many times the address on the ID tells a different story from the one verbally shared.

3. Keep a file of those who have requested help. This should include their picture, request, and any decision made concerning their request. If they do not have a photo ID ask for permission to take a picture with your camera. In my experience, some will revisit periodically to see if you remember them. I was told by one man, whom we had helped one year earlier, that he had never been to our city and that we had helped his twin brother.

4. Ask common sense questions:

“Where are you from?”

“Why are you here?”

“How did your route from Florida to Ohio lead you to Branson, Missouri?”

5. Ask for references. Who do you know that can verify your story? Have you been helped by other churches? If so, which ones?

6. If they claim to be a member of the church there should be someone in another congregation who knows them.

7. Ask if they are affiliated with any religious

group. Why are they not receiving help from “their” church?

8. Ask if they are interested in pleasing God. Pleasing God includes worship. Are they interested in Bible study? Some may fake their interest in order to hopefully obtain physical relief. But even the Lord had those who temporarily followed Him in hopes of a free meal (loaves and fishes). If your requester has an impure heart, it will not be long before it is manifested.

9. If the one requesting assistance is from our local area we always ask; “And what is your plan?” We only give assistance to those who have a plan of recovery, or are willing to let us help them develop a plan of recovery. If they prove to be true in their desire to work “the plan” we continue to help them. But we always include Bible study and church service as part of the plan.

Seldom has been the case where we assisted people who had predetermined that the church is “supposed” to help them just because they proclaim they are having financial difficulty. One young man demanded we pay for a motel and that we give him \$300 for a drug rehab program fee. When we refused to immediately agree he stood up and shouted at me, “Take off your glasses!” On that occasion we needed the assistance of our local police department.

CONCLUSION

There will never be a shortage of people in need. Our goal as children of God should be to help those

with honest hearts to realize that Jesus is the answer to all their needs. That process may first involve showing compassion. It should not be our desire to be finished with the needy as swiftly as possible. Sometimes the ground in which we want to plant a garden needs preparation. Is it possible that we pray for opportunities in which to share the gospel, and then become selective as to who we are willing to expend our effort? Let us pray that is never the case.

Sadly, however, it is possible that our effort to be compassionate towards those requesting assistance is as beneficial as presenting pearls to a pig as a gift. Pigs do not appreciate the value of a precious jewel. They will certainly mash the pearls into the mud under their feet. All should agree that to give valuable jewelry to a pig is foolish.

If you do not give pigs what they desire, they will eventually turn and attack you. Pigs only want what pigs want (Mat. 7:6). Pigs expect what they desire. Some people in need are like pigs; they only want what they want, and expect to receive only what they desire. It is wrong to give what is holy to dogs (Mat. 7:5). Sometimes it takes much effort to determine whether a person in need is a greedy pig or just a sheep in need of a shepherd. May it be our desire to always do that which is good when we have the opportunity; but we should never help someone to be comfortable in their sin under the pretense of doing that which is good and right. Under such circumstances physically helping is spiritually harmful.

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Do I Become Your Enemy Because I Tell You The Truth?

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INTRODUCTION

The Lord and Savior of humanity made many declarations of Himself and His mission while on earth. Among the most memorable and impressive was His claim to be Divine. Which claim He made more than once; John recorded, our Lord thusly:

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:16-18). (King James Version Bible).

The Lord's words bore the same meaning when He spoke of His oneness with God. Therefore the Jews

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reaction was the same.

I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God (John 10:30-33).

The Lord proved His claim to be Divine by His knowledge, power and resurrection. Therefore, the other claims He made are certainly believable but no less impressive. Consider His claim about His power over death.

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).

No one has ever spoken about their death in these terms, and to be sure no one has ever been able to walk out of the grave on their own accord. That Jesus did is evidenced by the apostles and eyewitnesses (Acts 1:3; Acts 2:29-32). More than five hundred brethren saw the resurrected Christ as well (1 Cor. 15:3-6). Further evidence was established by the apostles and the early church in giving their lives for the truth they beheld. They were threatened and beaten and took it gladly, “they counted it a joy to suffer for his name” (Acts 4-5).

There is another claim of Jesus that stands out as significant. It is a call to all the inhabitants of heaven and earth to hear. It is a claim that settles disputes from the dawn of time until this very hour. This claim is a declaration to every legislature and judiciary that has or will ever exist. Lawyers should hear this claim and judges should be alerted that it has been made. For the One who made the claim will be the judge of all men.

What claim did our Lord make that is so significant? What thing did our Lord proclaim that should garner the attention of all men? I'll tell you. Jesus was preparing His apostles for His departure. He served them and left them an example to follow (John 13). He comforted them and assured them He would come back for them (John 14). He cleansed them and charged them to abide in him; for without him they could do nothing (John 15). He promised them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would guide them into all truth (John 16). He prayed for himself, His apostles and all who would believe on him through their word (John 17). He went to the garden, was arrested and went to cross (John 18-19).

In the midst of His comfort and assurance He told His disciples that He must leave them. Listen to a portion of the conversation and hear the Lord's powerful claim.

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

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prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, **I am** the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (John 14:1-6). (emp. added ELO).

Jesus Christ, the Divine Nature in a body, is the truth. The implications of the claim are numerous and certain. If Jesus is the truth, any disagreement with Jesus is wrong. If Jesus is the truth, whatever He teaches is correct. The Divine Nature cannot lie and therefore whatever Jesus says is always the truth (Tit. 1:2). Since truth is spoken and practiced, anything Jesus did is right (Acts 1:1). It is also the case then that any way Jesus treated His fellow man is righteous. Equally true would be that however Christ spoke of and interacted with God is holy (John 8:29). It is certainly the case that no human philosopher, theist, scientist, poet, or any human being can know better than Jesus. The claim of Christ as the truth brings us to our title. For the apostle Paul sought to preach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

THE APOSTLE PAUL AND TRUTH

There was a time in Paul's life when he did not believe Jesus was the truth. He was doing all he could to oppose Christ and His teaching. By the time he gave a defense of his actions toward Christ, he had become

a believer in Christ. Nevertheless, his explanation gives insight into his previous thinking.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts 26:8-11).

Opposing Christ was personal for Paul. He premeditated opposition, and he followed through; he did many things contrary to the name of Jesus. Paul was confronted by the Christ he persecuted and learned that he was wrong and Christ was the truth (Acts 9:1-18). This man who once persecuted the way became one of the greatest proponents of the gospel he once tried to destroy.

When he spoke of Christ he spoke of his most earnest desire being to know Him and the power of his resurrection (Phi. 3:7-11). Such is the power of truth. Truth converts, heals, helps, frees, leads, comforts, assures, gives hope and eventually leads to heaven. All of these things and more could be said of Jesus. These are also the reasons the gospel is called good news.

Paul was put into the service of the Lord to preach the truth. He was sent to take the good news unto all men, and he did. That good news turned

men and women from idolatry (1 The. 1:9-10). The truth of Jesus Christ converted men and women from immorality (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The gospel Paul preached rescued men and women from the darkness of sin and brought them into the light of Christ (Col. 1:13). Souls were saved and promised heaven if they remained faithful to God.

Paul therefore, was deeply concerned and hurt when false teachers entered the flock of the Lord and sought to turn them away from the truth. When this situation happened, Paul wrote, rebuked, preached, prayed, and pled for his brethren to reject false teachers and hold onto Christ. Such is the setting for his letter to the Galatians.

PAUL'S QUESTION TO THE GALATIANS

In the fourth chapter of the book, Paul asked his brethren a piercing question. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Given the many benefits of hearing the truth it would naturally be thought that the person who delivers truth would be received with love. Paul's question is asked because what should be is not always lived in the lives of God's children.

Sadly, for some, the answer to Paul's question is yes and history affords many examples. When Ahab wanted to go to war he called his "prophets" and wise men to give him counsel. Everyone of his wise men told him to go to war and God would give him the victory. The wise Jehoshaphat asked for a second opinion. Was there anyone else who could weigh in on the matter?

Was there another man who wouldn't just agree but actually tell the truth. Ahab did know of someone else, consider his powerful admission.

Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the king's hand. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so (I Kin. 22:6-8).

Ahab hated Micaiah because whenever Micaiah spoke to him, he always told him the truth. The truth infuriated Ahab and instead of obeying the truth, he chose to hate the one who spoke truth to him. Paul was concerned that the Galatians were treating him in the same manner, thus his question, "Do I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"

The faithful Stephen encountered men who responded in the same manner when he told them the truth.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens

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opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul (Acts 7:54-58).

We could multiply the sad scene many times over. Our Lord stood before Pilate and Pilate knew the truth. For he knew that for envy they had delivered him (Mat. 27:18). Still, he gave the Lord into the hands of wicked men, who killed Jesus. Then he had the audacity to ask the Lord, "what is truth?"

Paul's question occurs in chapter 4, but it may be the things he had already told them that was creating a problem for them. Sadly, the same truths they were told, produces the same reaction from men today. What made Paul their enemy?

TRUTHS PAUL TOLD THE GALATIANS

Those who do not love and obey the truth will be lost eternally (2 The. 2:10-11). Therefore, we must not be like the Galatians and make the one who tells us the truth our enemy. Examine yourself and ask, does one become my enemy if he tells me what Paul told the Galatians? **Paul told the brethren the truth of his apostleship (Gal. 1:1-5).**

The word apostle is defined as: 1) a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders (Thayer e-sword.com).² Those who suggest that Paul's writings are out of date or out of step with culture need to remember

this truth. Paul was appointed by heaven to preach the gospel. His apostleship was not from man, but from the one who raised Christ from the dead.

Peter agreed Paul wrote Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

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.

Paul was guided into all truth concerning a wide range of topics. Paul wrote of worship, salvation, holy living, marriage, parenting, morality and more. Consider also Galatians 1:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 14:37. His words are not out of date; he wrote Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty seven New Testament books. If we don't love the truth, undoubtedly Paul will become our enemy.

Paul told the brethren the truth about the gospels singular nature (Gal. 1:6-12).

There was one gospel when Paul preached and wrote and there is one gospel today. The word another occurs in verses six and seven. In verse six Strong's, says of another, other or different (Strong's e.sword.com).³ Thayer adds, 1b) to quality, 1b1) another: i.e. one not of the same nature, form, class, kind, different (Thayer,

e.sword.com).⁴

Paul's point is there is not another or different gospel (vs 7). Therefore those who are preaching another gospel are perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth is, those perverting the gospel were the problem, not Paul. It is the preaching of another gospel that is troubling the brethren, not Paul's preaching of the truth.

Instead of Paul becoming our enemy, we should heed his warning. If anyone, a false apostle, a true apostle or even if an angel preaches any other gospel let them be separated from Christ eternally. Will one become your enemy, if he tells you there is only one gospel and all others are perversions and if other gospels are followed one will be led to eternal damnation?

Paul told the brethren the truth about his father's religion (Gal. 1:13-24).

Looking back on his life Paul acknowledged his dedication to his father's religion. Many people can relate to Paul, but few can equal Paul's commitment. In many passages he relates his past. Each instance manifests an extremely dedicated individual. In Acts 7, he held the coats of those who stoned Stephen. He persecuted men and women and wrought havoc on the church (Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9:1-4). He gave his voice against the cause of Christ and the Lord's people (Acts 26:9-11). He was injurious, obstinate and a difficult man (1 Tim. 1:12-14).

But, when he learned the truth, he did not confer

with flesh and blood. He didn't ask his mama or daddy should he obey Christ. He didn't go check with his teacher (in our day, Pastors, Bishops or Clergy) to see if he should submit to the gospel. Paul's determination against Christ was only matched by his dedication for Christ.

Paul gave up his father's religion, even though he was excelling in it above his peers. He gave up his father's religion even though it had been all he'd ever known. Paul gave up his father's religion when he learned the truth. Instead of those who share the good news of Jesus Christ today becoming our enemy, we like Paul should give up our father's or mother's religion and obey the truth.

The saints who once heard of Saul persecuting the church, now heard of Paul preaching the gospel and being a member of the church. Paul said it best, "And they glorified God in me" (Gal. 1:24).

CHAPTER 2

Paul told the truth about false teachers (Gal. 2:1-3).

Some of the Jews sought to bind circumcision on the Gentile brethren. They taught that if one was not circumcised he could not be saved (Acts 15:1-2). Paul refused to have Titus circumcised to prevent this error from having any traction. Any individual attempting to bind on God's people requirements that God didn't command must be withstood.

Paul told the truth about how to deal with false teachers (Gal. 2:4-5).

He identified them as false brethren. He prohibited the brethren that they sought entry among them through false pretense. Paul withstood them, telling the brethren that the false brethren were not given a single hour to teach their error. These false brethren are not heathens or idolatrous people. They were actually those who believed themselves to hold more closely to God's word than others. However, they were binding on God's people commands God didn't give. Would Paul become your enemy if he told you that those who claim to serve God more strictly than others could be false brethren? Would Paul become your enemy if anyone who sought to bind requirements beyond God's requirements should be identified and rejected?

Paul told the truth about living the faith (Gal. 2:11-16).

The apostle Peter was present when the circumcision issue was being discussed (Acts 15:1-5). Peter actually spoke up on behalf of the Gentile brethren and their equal standing before God (Acts 15:7-11). As Peter spoke he acknowledged that he was the one who preached the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2) and the Gentiles (Acts 10).

Therefore, when Peter separated himself from his Gentile brethren because the Jews came, he committed a grave error against his brethren. Christ death, burial and resurrection had reconciled all men to God (Eph. 2:11-16). Peter had preached that very message but he neglected to practice it.

Paul proclaimed and demanded truth to be practiced. Racism has no place in the kingdom of God.

Talking is one thing and as the old saying goes, “talk is cheap.” Anyone refusing to walk uprightly according to the truth, should be confronted and withstood. Would Paul become your enemy if he told you saying the right thing isn’t good enough? We have to live the truth about race relations in the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 3

Paul told the truth about falling away (Gal. 3:1-5).

Paul’s urgency is seen in the strong words he used. He calls the Galatians foolish because they were no longer obeying Christ. There are few words that better describe a Christian turning away from Christ than foolish. Saying one can fall away so as to forfeit one’s salvation is not popular but it is scriptural. Paul said it in chapter 1:6-9; he says it again in here in chapter 3:1-5; he says again in chapter five and verse four. Would Paul become your enemy for saying you can lose your salvation?

Paul told the truth about being led astray (Gal. 1:6-9; Gal. 2:1-5; Gal. 3:1-5; Gal. 5:1-4, Gal. 6:1-2).

For every warning about one falling away, there is an equal warning about the one who is leading others astray. False teachers in the body of Christ are as real today as they were in Galatia. Unfortunately, it is not the false teachers that stand out and are marked and avoided. It is often those warning about the false teachers that become the enemy.

Paul is facing the exact same problem, thus his

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question: “Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth.” False teachers have had their way with God’s people; see the prophets. Peter said there were false prophets among God’s people and there will be false teachers among God’s people (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Don’t let the one telling you the truth become your enemy, while the false teachers become your friend.

Paul told the truth about the law (Gal. 3:8-25).

The gospel was always God’s plan to redeem humanity, not the law. The promises to Abraham is the covenant that included the Gentiles. The Abrahamic promise came before the Law of Moses. Jesus is the seed of promise. The law of Moses was added because of transgression, till the seed should come. Once the Christ came the law was taken out of the way and nailed to his cross. We are not bound by the Law of Moses. Would Paul become the enemy of those who seek to find authority under law?

Paul told the truth about oneness in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29).

God’s children are made so by faith not by the works of the law. Since, the gospel is for all, there is no distinction between those who become Christians. There is no difference in ethnicity, no difference in gender, no social or economical distinctions exist. Is Paul your enemy if you seek to make his words mean there are no roles in Christ? Paul is talking about equality in the gospel not a removal of roles within the home or church. The same inspired apostle penned

Ephesians 5 and 1 Timothy 2. The first speaks of roles in marriage the second speaks of roles within the church.

CHAPTER 4

Paul told the truth about freedom in Christ (Gal. 4:1-7).

Freedom in Christ is the result of Christ's sacrifice not our goodness. Christians are not merely servants of God through Christ, we are sons of God. The freedom God gives His children is to be enjoyed by His children. Having been redeemed we are free from the bondage of sin. Christ sacrifice took away the law and made us free from bondage.

Paul told the truth about freedom from human rules (Gal. 4:8-20).

Christians are also free from man made laws and traditions. No one should allow himself to be bound by the thoughts, ideas and rules of other humans. Paul urges the saints to refuse to listen to those who sought to affect them adversely. Paul cautioned the ones who were affecting them would also exclude them. It is a truism that those who make the rules are always exempt from the rules.

Paul told the truth about the true children of God (Gal. 4:21-31).

Christians are the true children of God. The relationship with God is not physical but spiritual. The saints were being persecuted by the Jews. Paul ends chapter three by saying those who are Christ's are the

seed of Abraham. He ends chapter four by using the allegory of Sarah and Hagar to teach that Christians are God's children and that the Jews would be cast out. Paul will become your enemy if you look for an earthly physical kingdom in which the Jews are restored as God's people on earth.

CHAPTER 5

Paul told the truth about apostasy (Gal. 5:1-5).

Paul has addressed this issue in the book and he returns to it again. Each time his speech becomes more urgent and forceful. He is amazed (Gal. 1:6-9); he calls the brethren foolish (Gal. 3:1-2). On this occasion Paul says that if the brethren do not stand still and refuse to be moved from Christ, our Lord would be of no effect unto them and they are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). Nearly all of the religious world disagrees with Paul concerning apostasy. Does Paul become your enemy because he taught that brethren were falling from grace?

Paul told the truth about circumcision (Gal. 5:6-15).

The effect that error was having on the souls of God's children was devastating. The language from heaven is clear. "Fallen from grace," "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth (Gal 5:7)." The leaven was spreading and destroying the whole lump. Paul was urgent, forceful and persistent in his denunciation of the Judaizers false teaching of circumcision.

Paul told the truth about the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-21).

The problem with false teaching is that when followed it leads to false living. In error, liberty yields a license to live sinfully. It is ironic even oxymoronic that when man makes his own rules he releases himself from responsibility. Maybe that is the point of not abiding in the truth.

The works of the flesh are manifest, they are evident. It is a truism, that when the word of God is rejected, immorality will follow. God's perfect character is the standard of behavior. Morality flows from the absolute good. The sins listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are nothing new to mankind. Genesis 6:5 records the thoughts and imaginations of man's heart being constantly evil, and God judged the world for sin (Gen. 6:7; Gen. 6:13).

Consider other instances in Scripture to see the same truth (Jud. 21:25; Hos, 4:1-6; Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev. 21:8). God condemns sin. Morality is absolute, and objective. Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Many people today have turned away from God concerning morality.

Does Paul become your enemy because he preached the truth about morality? Truth is not changed or altered by who sins. You must make sure that you do not accept sin from some people while condemning sin in others.

Paul told the truth about the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

The faith of Jesus Christ produces the life of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit reveals God's spiritual message to direct and change the spirit of man. Spiritual people are led to live spiritual lives by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Our spirits ought to be in harmony with God's Spirit. God is Spirit. His message is Spirit (John 6:63). We have received the seed of the kingdom into our hearts. The fruit produced in our lives is spiritual fruit.

The truth is God's people must live changed, reformed, transformed. If we live of the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance should describe every Christian. But if we live carnal lives our minds will direct our bodies to produce the works of the flesh.

Paul speaks about changed lives in his other epistles. In Ephesians 4:17-23, Paul tells the saints to put off the old man and put on the new man. They had learned Christ and been renewed in the spirit of their minds. In Ephesians 5:1-10, he instructs us to follow God as dear children and to walk in love as Christ loved us. He also tells the saints that fornication and all uncleanness is not to once be named among them as saints. In Ephesians 5:9 Paul penned, "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

To God's children directed and led by the world: has Paul become your enemy by demanding that Christians live sanctified, holy lives? How sad that many today would hate Paul instead of rejecting those who are perverting the truth and approving of sin among God's people.

CHAPTER 6

Paul told the truth about Christian obligation to one another (Gal. 6:1-3).

Paul continued the thought of spirituality by instructing the saints to restore their erring brothers. It is possible for one to err from the truth and Scripture demands that those who are spiritual seek to restore them to Christ (see also Jam. 5:19-20; Jude 1:22-23). The bearing of each others burdens is the same as being our brothers keepers. Christianity is a family with love being the tie that binds. Christianity is also a body with every member working together. When one member hurts we all hurt. What family who has a member who wanders away from home wouldn't seek to bring him back?

Paul told the truth about Christian obligations to one's self (Gal. 6:4-5).

Far too many Christians have gotten comfortable blaming their unfaithfulness to Christ or the church. While we are obligated to help each other carry heavy burdens, the personal responsibility of faithfulness to Christ cannot be outsourced. The brethren were being affected by the false teachers, but they were choosing to follow the false teachers. Your faith is your faith and every man must bear his own burden. God has never allowed us to blame someone else for our spiritual lives and he won't start now. Paul will be the enemy of all those who seek to excuse themselves while accusing the brethren for the lives and choices they make.

Paul told the truth about paying preachers (Gal. 6:6).

Paul addressed this issue to the brethren in Corinth as well (1 Cor. 9:7-14). However he was not the only one our Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel. Brethren who refuse to pay or put down and disdain preachers for striving to live by the gospel, disagree with Christ. And no one disagreeing with Christ can ever be correct or approved of by God, after all Jesus is the truth. Amazingly, the false teachers were being supported while Paul was becoming their enemy (1 Tim. 6:1-5; 2 Cor. 11:19-20).

Paul told the truth about sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8).

The false teachers false doctrine would lead to eternal ruin. The sowing to the flesh would reap a harvest of destruction. The law of sowing and reaping is established in creation (Gen. 1:11). The spiritual nature of that law is as certain as the physical law. We reap what we sow. False teachers take advantage of God's people. Peter said, they make merchandise of God's people. But they are never around to pick up the pieces of the shattered lives of those who followed their smooth words and fair speeches.

Conversely, the faithful who sow to the spirit and live spiritual self controlled, humble contended lives will reap everlasting life. Paul will urge to not be weary and this is the reason why. Eternal life for the faithful is as certain as corruption for the unfaithful. No one will mock God. No one will fool God. The wicked promise life but in the end they will deliver death. The only

ones fooled is the false teacher and those who follow him. God will not be mocked, we will reap what we sow!

Paul told the truth about not quitting (Gal. 6:9-10).

Faithful living leads to victory. The truth is we must be faithful until death in order to receive a crown of life. Paul's exhortation is for the brethren to not become weary in well doing. Faithful living can be challenging. The world is constant in its wickedness. Hurt and pain sometimes comes from within the body. We must overcome our own shortcomings and temptations. Yet, the only way to reap the harvest is to continue to faithfully sow the seed.

The motivation to persevere is the certainty of the harvest; we will reap if we faint not. Paul exhorted saints in Corinth to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that their labor was not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor.15:58). John exhorted the saints to be faithful until death (Rev. 2:10). Those who obey the gospel are expected to remain faithful until their souls reach the shores of eternity.

Christianity however is not simply about the faithful life of the saints, it is also about doing good to others. Doing good to all men includes those who don't look like us. Doing good to others means counting men equal to ourselves. Doing good to others means treating others as we would want to be treated (Mat. 7:12).

Christians are those who have been called out of the world, having been changed by Christ. Thus changed Christians go back into the world and shine the light of

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Christ. When others see their good works, God can be glorified. And since saints are to do good to the world, they are especially to do good to their brethren.

APPLICATION

The apostle Paul wrote thirteen of twenty-seven New Testament books. We will truly have to love truth to not be offended and hate something Paul wrote by inspiration. Understanding his brethren's reaction to the truth Paul asked, "Do I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" You and I must answer the same question. In a world where truth is denounced, rejected, suppressed, altered and denied. Paul would make many enemies today. The question is, would he be your enemy?

Does Paul become or does anyone who preaches these truths become your enemy?

- 1) All Scripture is inspired of God.
- 2) There is one gospel; all others are perversions.
- 3) No human religion is acceptable to God. We must give them up.
- 4) False brethren are in the church seeking to bring us into bondage.
- 5) Racism is sinful and those who practice it must be withstood.
- 6) Apostasy is possible; it is foolish to leave Jesus.
- 7) There is no distinction in the gospel; but there are distinctions in roles in the kingdom.

- 8) Those who bind where God has not bound are false brethren.
- 9) Morality is objective and absolute; therefore, we must turn from sin.
- 10) Spiritual brethren must help bear the burdens of those who are overcome with this life.
- 11) Each person must bear his own burden. We can't blame anyone else for our unfaithfulness.
- 12) We will reap what we sow, and the harvest is certain.

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DO I BECOME YOUR ENEMY BECAUSE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH?

Spare The Rod, Spoil The Child

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INTRODUCTION

No institution, other than perhaps the Lord's church, has suffered more egregious attacks than the home. In his relentless quest to subdue and subvert this crucial community, our perennial adversary—the devil (1 Pet. 5:8), has employed every malevolent device at his disposal (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11; John 8:44). Homosexuality, gender confusion, women's rights, addiction and substance abuse, pornography, absentee parents, entertainment overload, infidelity, separation, divorce, the abdication of the husband's role as leader of the family, the wife's renunciation of her call to submission, over-work, selfishness, immodesty and materialism are but a few of Satan's accoutrements that have wrought havoc upon the family.

However politically incorrect it might be considered in today's permissive society, it is absolutely imperative that godly, Christian parents are not only a) well-versed in the kind of home that is pleasing to God (cf. Psa.

127:1; Deu. 6:4-8; Eph. 5:22-33; 6:1), but that they are also b) keenly aware of the imminent dangers that threaten its security and stability (cf. 1 Chr. 12:32).

One such peril involves **the failure of fathers and mothers to properly train and discipline their children**. Solomon wrote, “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pro. 13:24). It has been my studied observation over several decades of observation and experience that many Christian parents tend to gravitate towards either one of two unwise extremes in regards to discipline, especially in the realm of corporal punishment.

Some have bought into the rather avant-garde thinking that any and all spanking is inherently negative and harmful and therefore must not be employed as a disciplinary tool in any context. They withhold the rod of discipline and in so doing, spoil, harm and even impair their children, not only in the short-term as adolescents, but in the long-term as adults. Unfortunately, children who are raised without proper discipline are cheated in at least two ways: a) they are taught to be self-centered (e.g., Eli’s sons—Hophni and Phinehas, 1 Sam. 2:12ff), (Samuel’s sons—Joel and Abijah, 1 Sam. 8:2-5), and (David’s son—Adonijah, 1 Kin. 1:6), and perhaps worst of all, b) they are taught implicitly that their parents really do not love them (Pro. 29:15; 3:11-12). Others recognize spanking as a necessary and viable tool in the training of their children, but they employ it a) either too readily and often because they are b) perhaps too lazy to learn and utilize the full-range of disciplinary techniques available to them. Both approaches, whether

it be withholding necessary discipline, or repeatedly employing spanking as the “go to” mechanism for any and all corrective needs have the very real potential of doing more lasting harm to their children than good (Pro. 29:15; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

This lecture is entitled, “Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child,” and includes four components. They are as follows:

1. **Receptivity**—Parents need to be receptive to at least two biblical principles pertaining to their children and discipline.
2. **Indefensibility**—Parents must recognize the obvious bias of many (not all) so-called authorities, doctors and psychologists, government day-care advocates, experts and social scientists who take an openly antagonistic stance against the teaching of inspired Scripture especially as it relates to child-rearing.
3. **Authority**—Parents ought to submit to the prerogative of the Lord and His Word in all matters of faith and practice—including what He says about corporal punishment.
4. **Practicality**—Parents should want to learn the best and most effective methods of administering corporal punishment to their children when it is deemed necessary.

I. RECEPTIVITY

Solomon said, “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Pro. 18:15). With this passage in mind, let’s ask this

initial question: Parents, do you possess the heart and ear to really internalize what the Word of God says about disciplining your children? If your answer is in the affirmative, please consider the following two principles:

Number one, you must recognize that **every child is unique and therefore responds differently to parental discipline in all its forms**. Consider, for example, Esau and Jacob. The brothers came from the same womb, were born moments apart, had the very same parents, and were raised in the same home. But it is obvious from even a cursory study of the Bible that they were very different in their interests, pursuits and attitudes (Gen. 25:24ff).

Esau was the outdoor type and spent much of his time in the fields hunting wild game, while Jacob was more absorbed with the interests and activities of home (v. 27). Esau tended to be impatient and sought to fulfill his immediate desires (vv. 29-30), while Jacob was more inclined to look at the long term. Esau possessed no interest in spiritual pursuits (v. 32; Heb. 12:16), while Jacob was just the opposite. Esau was closer to his father, Isaac, while Jacob was more emotionally attached to his mother, Rebekah (Gen. 27).

The two brothers simply illustrate the fact that different kids are just that—different, and therefore react and respond to discipline in accordance with a wide-range of emotional, physical, relational (i.e., birth order) and even genetic influences.

The thing about discipline is that not every kid responds to the same strategies and one strategy that may work like magic with one kid could fail miserably with another. The truth is, some

kids are easier to parent than others... In a recent study, researchers came to the conclusion that for discipline to be effective, it had to be tailored to individual kids' personalities. In other words, using the same parenting style with all your children will not guarantee success if their personalities are radically different. As most parents know, it is not uncommon for two kids raised exactly the same (if that's actually possible—mb) to be nothing alike. The study which was conducted over a three-year period with the participation of 214 children and their mothers found that different children react to the same parenting style differently..." (Peleni).

Solomon wrote, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Pro. 22:6). For much of my life I was taught that this passage meant, "When parents do a faithful job of raising and disciplining their children in the 'nurture and admonition of the Lord,' that those children will a) surely obey the gospel, and b) never fall away from the Faith, and c) if they do in fact, fall and therefore leave God (Luke 15:13; Gal. 6:1a; Jam. 5:19a), they will d) always be restored before they die."

A few questions are in order in view of this popular interpretation:

1. Is it always true, 100% of the time, that an adult child who departs from the Lord will always be restored before he or she dies?
2. What has been your experience and observation in this regard?
3. Is it possible to be a good, even great parent, and your child or children still fall away from

the faith and be lost?

4. Observation: God is a perfect parent and yet we know some children will not be in heaven.
5. If it is not possible to be well-trained as a child, but then depart as an adult, how can we account for all of the Bible passages (2,000+!) that teach the possibility of apostasy?
6. Are we prepared to teach that Proverbs 22:6 endorses the doctrine of “once-saved, always-saved”?

A much better and more faithful approach (cf. Luke 10:26) of the passages is to lay stress on the phrase, “in the way HE should go” (emphasis mine—mb). “The training prescribe is lit. according to his (the child’s) way,’ implying, it seems, respect for individuality and vocation, though not for his self-will... But the stress is on parental opportunity and duty” (Kidner). “Or, according to the tenor of his way, i.e. the path specially belonging to, specially fitted for, the individual’s character. The proverb enjoins the closest possible study of each child’s temperament and the adaptation of “his way of life’ to that” (Bible Commentary on the Old Testament, Proverbs—Ezekiel).

Closing observations about Proverbs 22:6:

- This passage does not say that one mistake or success in parenting means that the child has been fully and completely trained.
- This verse does not say that the only training that a child receives is from his or her parents.
- This verse does not say that there is only one practical way to train all children.

Number two, parents must acknowledge that **all forms of discipline—including spanking, are expressions of parents’ deep and abiding love for their children.** The ultimate goal of all devoted and faithful parents is to positively impact the eternal souls of their children. And, obviously one of the ways fathers and mothers do just that is through corrective, yea even physically painful chastisement.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons (Heb. 12:5-8).

From the Scriptures, our writer draws an analogy to help us understand God’s role in our suffering—that of a **father’s ‘tough love.’** The logic of the argument runs from lesser (human) to greater (divine) but the very use of the analogy suggest that what we think of God may first be shaped by what we think of our fathers. When verse 9 says, ‘We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it,’ it speaks to first-century Mediterranean cultures rather than to twentieth-century America. Unfortunately, neither discipline nor respect are a part of the experience of most children today. Fewer and fewer have human fathers who discipline with a consistent, character-building

goal in mind and our culture with near unanimity degrades such fathers. Blessed is the child whose father cares enough to draw careful, clear rules for right living and then justly punishes infractions. **Such fathers imitate God in this grace, for we have a heavenly Father who cares enough to do just that for his children.** The ends of God's discipline can also be found in these verses. One is life: 'How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirit and live!' (v. 9). The training of his discipline is designed to make us tough enough to last, strong enough to endure so that we can receive our rich reward..." (Girdwood/Verkruyse, emphasis mine—mb).

The readers have forgotten the exhortation given to them in the Scriptures. Clearly the author believes the words recorded in Prov. 3:11-12 function as an encouragement for the readers of his day. They are not merely words of antiquity directed to a former generation. What was written long ago is also addressed to contemporary readers...

The readers should not dismiss the Lord's discipline by taking it lightly. The discipline in view here should not be understood as punitive but as corrective and educative. Still, the discipline here indicates training for godliness in general and discipline for sin. Not all discipline is due to sin, but some discipline is given to wean believers away from sin. It is part of the training God has planned for his children, so they grow in righteousness. They should consider its purposes and benefits. Nor should they be discouraged or 'grow weary' when they are 'reproved' by God. Here the author picks up his admonition from

verse 3 where he instructs the readers to consider the opposition Jesus received so they won't 'lose heart'. **The difficult circumstances in which they find themselves could exhaust and enervate them, but, as the author explains here, they should draw the opposite conclusion. Their sufferings signify that they truly belong to God, that they are his sons, and that they are deeply loved by God** (Schreiner, emphasis mine—mb).

So what are we being taught here? **God allows bad things, hard things, and difficult things to happen to us to teach us, reprove us, discipline us, and whip us into shape. God spans us! The atheist says there is no God because bad things happen. God says, "What kind of father would I be to you if I gave you the easy life?" Every child needs correcting.** Every child needs hardships to learn. We are not sheltered, and neither should our children be sheltered from consequences and mistakes. We learn from pain. We change because of hardships. In fact, notice in verse 8 that God declares that we are illegitimate children if we are left without discipline. God says that that it is neglect and child abuse if he does not discipline us as children. No discipline, no whipping, and no reproof shows that you are not my child and I do not love you (Kercheville—emphasis mine, mb).

Several applicable questions from this passage in Hebrews 12 need to be considered:

1. Is it possible to be a good parent (as God is), and engage in painful, corrective discipline out of love for your child? Does God's parental

- discipline mean that He does not love us?
2. If God as a parent spared the rod, what would that communicate to us about His attitude toward us (Pro. 13:24; 3:11-12)?
 3. Does painful—physical/corporal discipline always mean that it will not be effective? (Was the Hebrew writer saying that God's painful discipline (as a parent) is effective, but a parent's painful discipline (i.e., corporal punishment) will inevitably be ineffective?)
 4. Does painful discipline (i.e., chastisement) really always mean that a parent doesn't love his child? According to Hebrews 12, how do we know that God as our Father/parent loves us?
 5. Are any/all of the verses that reference corporal punishment out of date and irrelevant to today (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:6-17)? Were the words taught by Solomon out of date by the time of the Hebrew writer?
 6. Are we prepared to say that since, as some claim, the Bible is out of date—at least in the realm of corporal punishment—that it is/can be out of date in other matters? (For example, since Ephesians 6:21-23 says that the husband is to be head of the household, is the Word old-fashioned and obsolete in this realm too?)
 7. Does the principle/lesson taught in Hebrews 12 contradict Proverbs 13:2?
 8. According to this passage, what was/is the purpose of a father's scourge?

II. INDEFENSIBILITY

The Psalmist wrote, “But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways” (Psa. 81:11-13). Even after having been delivered from Pharaoh and Egypt, God’s people had rejected His word. In their stubbornness they walked in their own councils (Pro. 18:11-13).

It is painfully apparent that many parents no longer heed the voice of God, rather they give ear to the councils of modern so-called authorities. Is it actually necessary for me to substantiate what the world says, not only about child-rearing (and specifically corporal punishment), but a host of other issues? What does the world say about homosexuality, about abortion, about the real “safe” sex (Heb. 13:4), about sex between consenting adults, about—yes—even sex between adults and minors, about euthanasia, about the very first home in Genesis, about transgenderism, about male/female roles in the church and home, about divorce, and a host of other subjects? Why is it that we refuse to buy into what “experts” tell us about sin and error, but we suddenly buy into what they claim about corporal punishment?! The truth of the matter is, the overwhelming majority of people in the world today believe that the Bible is irrelevant, out of date, and actually hurts and harms the modern home! Consider the following:

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently released a policy statement confirming its opposition to corporal punishment (any form of physical punishment, including spanking), stating that **it's harmful and ineffective. That conclusion is backed up by health professionals and extensive research.**

According to Catherine A. Taylor, associate professor of global community health and behavioral sciences at Tulane University of Tropical Medicine, whose research was heavily cited in the AAP policy statement, **'corporal punishment increases risk for all kinds of health problems.'**

Research published in the Journal of Family Psychology in 2016 found that despite the wide use of spanking, there was **no evidence linking spanking to improved child behavior.** On the contrary; **spanking was found to be associated with increased risk of 13 detrimental outcomes, including aggression, anti-social behavior, impaired cognitive ability, mental health problems and physical injury.**

'Corporal punishment teaches children that aggression and violence are acceptable ways to manage anger and difficult emotions,' says Taylor...

Spanking can also have a **detrimental effect on the parent-child relationship, as well as the child's future relationships,** says clinical social worker and founder of the Critical Therapy Center, Silvia M. Dutchevici. **'For children to see one's parents in such a state of rage is frightening,'** she says. **'Further, it teaches them**

in a very experiential way that when people lose control of their emotions, anything can happen.’

Dutchevici has worked with victims of domestic violence for many years, and knows firsthand that **there is a direct psychological link between hitting a child and the chances of that child ending up in abusive relationships—which is backed up by research.** ‘In simple terms, if the people who you know are there to love and support you—your parents—hit and hurt you, then love and violence become intertwined in a very unhealthy way,’ she explains.

If research and expert opinion isn’t enough to stop parents spanking their kids, then there’s also the simple fact that it doesn’t work (Gillespie—emphasis mine, mb)

Several pertinent questions have to be considered in light of these claims and statements:

1. Since Gillespie claims that corporal punishment is harmful and ineffective, are we therefore prepared to say equally that God’s painful discipline is likewise harmful and ineffective?
2. Would God approve of/endorse something He knew/knows would produce aggression, and anti-social behavior, etc.?
3. Is corporal punishment as approved in the Scriptures really teaching children that aggression and violence are acceptable ways to manage anger and difficult emotions (1 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 3:3; Pro. 3:31; 11:5; Tit. 3:2; Mat. 5:38-39; Gal. 5:19-21)?

4. Is God teaching His children aggression/violence when He disciplines them?
5. Does God's discipline mean that He's lost control of His emotions?
6. Is God's discipline equal to abuse—and does His discipline therefore produce abusers?

Most American parents hit their little children. And most believe that they are doing something effective and right. But they are wrong. The scientific case against spanking is one of those rare occasions in which, over a span of 50 years or so, a scientific controversy actually gets resolved, as various programs of increasingly rigorous research converge upon a consensus conclusion.

True, the issue has not been 100% mapped out. Waiting for social science to map any issue out 100% is like waiting for the perfect spouse. You'll wait forever, pointlessly. Spanking, like any socio-behavior phenomenon, is bound to have somewhat differing implications depending on multiple variable such as culture, timing, dose, gender, what definition of spanking is used, etc...

Another hindrance to an air-tight resolution concerns the fact that, due to ethical constraints (you can't randomly assign parents to spanking and non spanking groups or assign children randomly to parents), true experimentation is all but impossible. In the absence of experimental evidence, causal relations are difficult to establish with certainty. Finding, as we have, that spanking strongly and consistently predicts negative developmental outcome does not in itself settle the question of whether spanking has caused the outcome..." (Shpancer, emphasis mine—mb).

John Rosemond, in his article, “Spanking often takes a beating from social scientists,” admits:

Four sentences into her Wall Street article on recent research into spanking (“Spanking for Misbehavior? It Causes More!” Dec. 17, 2017), the author, Susan Pinker, makes two grievous errors: first **she says that children under 7 cannot master their emotions**; second, she says a fair amount of misbehavior on the part of a young child distinguishes him from a robot.

So here we go again with a typical post-1960s parenting canard: proper discipline, which should indeed instill reasonably good emotional control into children as young as 4, turns children into unquestioning robots. I heard this claptrap in graduate school, courtesy of my professors, most of whom were enamored with new ideas concerning children...

Pinker references a 2016 survey that found two-thirds of American parents are in favor of at least occasional spankings—‘hard’ ones, even. According to her, that’s bad news because another 2016 study—a meta-analysis of five decades of research into spanking—found that spanking is associated with increased ‘acting out’ and future mental health problems. Now, in fairness, Pinker **admits that these correlations do not prove a cause-effect relationship**. But she is then quick to point out that a new study from the University of Texas, Austin, strengthens the argument that spankings actually cause future psychological and behavior problems.

It is interesting to note that a meta-analysis of 50 years of media coverage of spanking would

certainly find that the mainstream media has been quick to publish any research that maligns spanking but has consistently turned a blind eye to research by credible, respected researchers like Diana Baumrind (UC-Berkley) and Robert Larzelere (Oklahoma State) finding that occasional, moderate spankings by loving parents (operative conditions), is associated with not only better behavior but also improved psychological well-being.

...As research finds and common sense confirms, disobedient children are not happy children. So it makes perfect sense that researchers find that spanking is associated with both increased misbehavior and later mental health problems. But that is not an indictment of spanking; not, at least, unless the researcher in question set out intending to malign it. Being a social scientist myself, I can attest that most social 'science' simply finds what the researcher expected, even wanted, to find, meaning that most social scientists are not scientists; rather, they are ideologues.

In my estimation, the real problem is that today's parents, by and large, do not know how to properly convey authority. They think authority is expressed by using proper consequences. So they attempt to discipline by manipulating reward and punishment. That works with dogs, but it does not work very well at all with human beings, the only species with a free will. Under the circumstances, behavior problems worsen, parental stress builds, and emotion-driven and therefore completely botched spankings become increasingly likely.

The conveyance of authority is accomplished via a proper attitude, not proper methods. The characteristics of the attitude in question—calm, confident composure—are universal leadership qualities. That attitude is what causes a child to invest complete trust in his parents, even if they occasionally spank him (Rosemond).

III. AUTHORITY

As Peter and John healed and taught the name of Jesus (Acts 3-4), the religious leaders in Jerusalem took exception to both their actions as well as their message. In an effort to stop any further influence of the church, they confronted the two apostles and asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” (Acts 4:7b). They wanted to know where the pair had secured the authority for both their words and actions. Peter told the rulers, “Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...” (v. 10). Parents, like all Christians, must have divine authority for whatever they practice in the home, including corporal punishment (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 3:17; Jud. 17:6). The question that begs to be asked and answered in this study is, “Do parents, in fact, have divine authority for the use of the rod of discipline” (cf. Pro. 6:23)? As we go to the Word we discover:

Number one, we have the **reasons** for the rod: a) folly—”Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Pro. 22:15). b) deliverance—“Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not

die. You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from Sheol” (Pro. 23:13-14):

Discipline includes more than just verbal instruction; corporal punishment is a necessary ingredient in the process. The verse gives a direct command not to omit the rod from our parenting. The latter half of verse 13 may be taken in two ways: (1) the child will survive the spanking; or (2) the child will survive because of the spanking (Anders).

Number two, we have the **roles** of the rod: a) to impart wisdom—“The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Pro. 29:15). “Correction, even if it requires a spanking, helps a child develop wisdom, the trait that will ultimately cause a mother to be proud of her children. But a child who is left to himself and allowed to develop however he wishes will become a fool who will cause his mother to be disgraced” (Ibid), and b) to create an atmosphere of peace and joy—“Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Pro. 29:17):

A parent who makes the effort to restrain and train his son will reap two benefits. First, your son will give you the peace of being able to relax, knowing that you need not worry about what he will do next. Wisdom itself will guide him well. Second, your son will give you joy. The Hebrew literally says, ‘dainties for the soul,’ a metaphor for the joyful satisfaction that comes from watching one’s offspring prosper and mature in the ways of God (Ibid).

Number three, we have the divine **regulation** to employ the rod: it is a) a parental right (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14), b) a parental act of faith (Pro. 23:13-14) because it says that the momentary pain and discomfort of the rod, in harmony with other disciplinary tools, will help steer the child away from behaviors and sins that will imperil his or her soul in the long-term, c) a parental expression of faithfulness to God—because even as a father’s and mother’s heart breaks every time he or she employs the rod (just like a congregation whose heart breaks when they practice church discipline—cf. Mat. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; 2 The. 3:14), they both recognize that real love for their heavenly Father matches what they believe with what they do (Deu. 11:1; Luke 11:28; John 15:9, 14-15; 2 John 1:6; Jas. 1:22-25), d) a parental responsibility (Deu. 4:9) because a child’s conduct sometimes warrants such an aggressive action (Pro. 22:15; 29:15) just like all other forms of discipline and direction, and e) a parental tool for reproof (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3; 29:15).

Number four, we have the **wresting** of the rod: a) the need for the rod does not give any parent the right to lose his or her temper (Jas. 1:19-20; Pro. 14:17, 29; 16:32; Pro. 29:11), b) the need for the rod does not license a parent to hit his or her children at any time they are so inclined (Tit. 1:7), and c) the need for the rod never authorizes a parent to vent his or her frustration or aggravation (Pro. 16:32; 25:28; Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2 Pet. 1:5-7) with that tool.

“So Mike,” a parent asks. “Since the rod is actually mandated by Scripture, what’s the difference between spanking and abuse?” One author’s comments are especially helpful:

There is great fear today, among some parents that spanking of children is abusive, and causes emotional harm, or may breed violence. This concern is understandable, considering how we love our children. Fortunately, biblical chastisement bears good fruit, but unfortunately, not everyone follows God’s guidelines. Consider the differences between loving, biblical chastisement and child abuse:

- Chastisement is a calm, controlled spanking on the bottom.
- Abuse is an angry, out-of-control beating, which may fall on the bottom or anywhere on the body. Such abusive chastisement may correct the misbehavior, but that child is not truly humbled—just terrorized into submission.
- Chastisement uses a lightweight rod on the bottom.
- Abuse shakes the body or pummels it with hand or any weapon handy.
- **Author’s note:** According to social scientists, “Corporal punishment (or physical punishment) in a family is an act deliberately performed by a parent, relative or other guardian causing pain or discomfort to an underage for some kind of unwanted behavior. Corporal punishment can be defined as slapping

or spanking a child with a hand or striking with another object such as a belt, cane, paddle or any other domestic article and also, often includes pinching, shaking, forced ingestion of substances, or forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions” (Motherhow.com).

- Chastisement is a planned action of love.
- Abuse is a reaction of anger. It is the venting of parental frustration, and feeds violence in children, causing them to vent their anger violently on others. (Young ones raised with loving chastisement are typically the least violent among children, because they are self-restrained, are not ruled by their anger, and have been trained to behave kindly toward all).
- Chastisement is done after the first offence, while the parent is still calm.
- Abuse results when parents do not bring swift chastisement, but wait for the child’s continued rebellion to make them angry enough to respond. Spanking is incorrectly used if it is a last resort rather than the first response for rebellion.
- Chastisement is loving and constructive.
- Abuse consists of hurtful, demeaning verbal attacks, which may accompany chastisement, but are often a substitute.
- Chastisement draws a parent and child together.
- Abuse alienates children from their parents. (Bradley)

IV. PRACTICALITY

It is essential that we ask, “What are some practical applications of God’s Word when it comes to spanking? In his excellent book, “Training a Child,” William Richardson shares the following questions, insights and advice. Note:

What is corporal punishment?

He defines corporal punishment as: “A negative physical consequence which suppresses behavior. By ‘negative physical consequence,’ I mean an unpleasant physical experience—a spanking that hurts. I believe in the value of corporal punishment, but of all my parental responsibilities, it is far and away the activity I like least. Spanking is grievous. Nevertheless, it is an invaluable teaching tool. I also do not like pain, but, it too is an invaluable teaching tool. A child touches a red-hot stove, feels searing pain and pulls away at once. The pain tells him that he is in danger of major tissue damage, ‘Remove hand at once!’ Pain is a warning, a deterrent to danger.

With no sensation of pain, we would inflict great damage on our bodies via fire, sharp objects or extreme weight. Physical pain is a part of God’s good design...an effective warning system. Corporal punishment is also part of His design, created to warn the little ones we love: ‘Do not continue in this behavior, it will harm you.’

Corporal punishment is for suppressing... slowing...decreasing...stopping children’s behavior. Corporal punishment is not designed to bring about new behavior... Corporal

punishment is for getting rid of certain behaviors, not for teaching new behaviors.

Most of us have fallen into the trap of trying to punish our children into new behaviors. Perhaps we have tried to punish a child into picking up a toy, going to sleep or cleaning a room. Spanking a child to teach a new behavior is using the wrong tool the wrong way. It does not work. Spanking may occasionally bully a child into doing something, but that 'success' was likely accidental and spawned negative side effects. Pushing a child into doing is dangerous. Punishing into doing can create power struggles and lead to child abuse. Use corporal punishment to teach a child to stop cursing, kicking, lying, stealing... Do not try to spank a child into picking up toys, using the potty, doing homework or saying 'please.'

When should parents employ corporal punishment?

Corporal punishment should be employed only in cases of dangerous or knowingly disobedient behavior... Examples include: a five-year-old annoying or teasing a dog, an eight-year-old climbing onto a roof, a two-year-old playing with car door-locks or handles while the car is in motion, (or) a three-year-old leaving the house unannounced. ... Corporal punishment is designed to be a swift and forceful teacher with immediate impact. I do not want to use a slower and less painful form of discipline when a child's welfare is at stake.

Corporal punishment is for dangerous or purposefully disobedient behavior... Corporal punishment is not for spilling milk, dropping a vase, forgetting or anything accidental. Corporal punishment is for deliberate, knowing

disobedience: when he uses a string of curse words, when she visits Susan's house after school and you told her not to, when he throws away his "F" paper and tells you he got a "B", when she cheats on the spelling test by copying from her neighbor, when he hits another child and takes their toy, when you tell her to put the crayons away and she defiantly throws a handful of them into your face.

Corporal punishment for mistakes is cruelty. Corporal punishment is reserved for intentional disobedient choice... Corporal punishment is not mandatory for either dangerous or purposefully disobedient behaviors. In some situations where corporal punishment could be used, another teaching method may be more effective.

Corporal punishment is an intense and dramatic teaching tool. It should not be overused. Overuse can lead to physical harm or it can teach a child to dread the presence of his or her parents. Overuse can also cause corporal punishment to lose its potency. It can be rendered ineffective by indiscriminate overuse.

How should parents use corporal punishment?

(It should be used) with clarity, with consistency, without delay, with an instrument of safe impact and without anger.

Corporal punishment should only be used after a behavior has been clearly defined as wrong. If the child has no idea what she did was prohibited, she should not be spanked. Such 'surprise' discipline is cruel, not educational. Remember, discipline is teaching, and maximum clarity around corporal

punishment enables children to maximally learn. Clearly specify that a certain behavior is prohibited and will result in spanking. Then make sure your child understands.

If a parent says that corporal punishment will be the result of lying, that parent should keep his promise. Inconsistency is confusing, cruel and sometimes dangerous.

Corporal punishment should occur as immediately as possible after the problem behavior. Telling three-year-old Sarah in the morning that her father will spank her when he returns home in the evening will not work. A general rule applies here: The younger the child, the more immediate the corporal punishment must be. (This rule applies to all discipline). Three-year-old Sarah does not have the cognitive ability to associate afternoon spanking with morning misbehaving. In her case, the corporal punishment must immediately follow the infraction.

Pain is a teaching tool, a useful warning of further physical danger. To teach well, corporal punishment must hurt—some. However, if corporal punishment is painful to the point of damage, it is no longer a teaching tool. If corporal punishment causes tissue damage, it becomes the danger rather than the warning. This is counter-productive perversion of corporal punishment.

In order to find the balance between impact and safety, I recommend no more than three firm swats to the child's posterior with a wide paddle. Three swats is enough to sting and provides a safe limit. A child's buttocks is sufficiently sensitive to allow the stinging sensation and is also

relatively free of fragile bones or organs. A flat paddle hurts, but runs minuscule risk of tissue damage...” (Richardson).

CONCLUSION

God is our Father. He created us and wants a relationship with us. It’s why He disciplines us. He wants to correct our hearts and reestablish our relationship with Him. He knows that we are fallible. He knows that if we wander from His love and protective care, we will get hurt and suffer. Because of His great love, He is not afraid to bring discomfort to our lives to bring us back to Him. It’s a heart issue. It is about restoration. It’s about a relationship.

He’s not disciplining us just because we made a mistake. He is disciplining us to bring us back to Him. There’s a consequence to doing life our own way. He is willing to inflict discomfort and pain to bring us back to His love.

As parents who want to build character in our children, we often need to discipline our children for the same reasons. **Discipline...is giving a measured amount of pain to train and correct a child around a heart issue, attitude, or behavior** (Rainey).

Father, mother—Solomon wrote, “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pro. 13:24). Do you love the Lord? Obey Him. Do you love your children? Show them.

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Hellfire And Brimstone Preaching Saves Souls

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INTRODUCTION

Clearly there is no concise statement that can summarize the grand message or theme of God's Holy Book, the Bible. However, the following statement seems to be a faithful attempt, namely: The Bible is about the salvation of man through Jesus Christ, to the glory of God! Even as far back as Genesis 3:15 we see God's amazing plan working to bring sinful man back to Himself. The salvation message

of Genesis 12:3—”in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”—finds its teaching weaved throughout the entirety of both the Old and New Testaments (Gen. 18:18; Gen. 22:18; Gen. 26:4; Gal. 3:8; Cf., also, Eph. 1:3; Eph. 3:9-11; Eph. 3:21). The latter part of John 12:47 finds Jesus revealing, “...for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” Luke 19:10 adds, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Likewise, the famous words of Romans 5:6-10 forever shows humanity that God deeply loves us and that He did His part to offer man salvation through the sacrifice and shed blood of Jesus, the Christ! How could any person honestly read the Bible and not realize that God deeply loves man and has made every provision for his salvation (Rom. 5:1; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 1:7). It seems that the love of God is intertwined with the blood of Christ in almost every verse, on each page and throughout all Biblical chapters. Yes, as Hebrews 2:9 reminds us, “... We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” 2 Corinthians 8:9 reads, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye though his poverty might be rich.” Again, speaking of Jesus, 1 John 2:2 adds, “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Without question God loves us, Jesus died for us and the salvation of men and women is God’s greatest desire (1 Tim. 2:3-6; John 4:35; Acts 8:12). Yet, what does the truth about God loving humanity and sending Jesus have to do with hellfire and brimstone preaching? In other words, if **“Hellfire And**

Brimstone Preaching Saves Souls,” as our title indicates, how does this concept work—especially when considering God’s love and Christ’s sacrifice? Let us consider the topic more fully.

If the theme of the Bible is: The salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God, and if that glorification of God only truly happens when men and women are faithful members of the Lord’s church (Eph. 3:21), then it follows that preaching Christ and His salvation, also involves preaching **various truths**—specifically noted here, the church (Mat. 16:18-19; Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13). In like manner, another one of these necessary truths is found in Proverbs 1:7. The text reads, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Similarly, Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” The point is this: Just as glorifying God, of necessity, involves preaching the church; so also, preaching the fear of God (that is preaching respect and awe toward God, for who God is) is required if one is to have true knowledge or wisdom—and this is where our topic enters the discussion.

The Biblical Heart (i.e., the inward man, the soul, the spirit, the real you, cf., 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23) is composed of four areas: 1) Free Will (Acts 10:34-35; Rev. 3:20), 2) Intellect (Deu. 8:5; Luke 6:45; Pro. 23:7; Psa. 37:31), 3) Conscience (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim. 4:2) and 4) Emotion (Exo. 4:14; Deu. 19:6; Ecc. 5:20). God created mankind with free-will (choice) and thus man can choose to accept or reject God’s Way (Deu. 11:26-28; Jos. 24:15; Rom. 6:16-18). Having the right information (God’s Word) in the

intellect (the thinking/reasoning part of man) is critical if a man or woman is to understand right from wrong (Psa. 119:9-11; Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 4:11). The conscience cannot be the guide (Acts 23:1), although if the correct information is within one's inward spirit (mind/intellect), then the conscience works as a wonderful God-given alarm system, but again an uneducated conscience (i.e., uneducated when compared with God's truth, Psa. 37:31; Psa. 119:11) cannot be trusted, because it can be wrong, hardened, seared, et cetera (Jam. 1:22; 26; 1 Tim. 4:2; Acts 23:1). Emotion is that outflow of feelings which come from the heart. As a word study of the heart (in the Bible) shows, the heart grieves, longs, loves, feels joy, expresses anger (i.e., it can be righteous anger or an unrighteous/selfish anger; cf., Mark 3:5 vs. Col. 3:8), hates, and the like. In fact, feeling guilt (as well as removal of that guilt when obeying God; cf., 1 Pet. 3:21) is perfectly in line with the way God made man. Sin should produce shame and guilt (Acts 2:37; Jer. 6:15; 1 Tim. 2:9), but sadly sometimes it does not (i.e., the hardening of the heart/searing of the conscience mentioned earlier; cf., Acts 7:54). Likewise, some who have been forgiven feel false guilt unnecessarily and need to grow in faith and confidence (Mat. 6:30; 1 John 3:20; 1 The. 5:14), whereas others do not feel guilt (when they should) because they have an uneducated conscience (Acts 23:1; John 17:17). Yes, the biblical heart (i.e., man's immortal soul or inward man, that is, his spirit) is an amazing thing. It is the "real you." It is the part of man that directs one's physical body (i.e., the mind/soul/spirit controls the flesh just as a driver controls a vehicle; cf., 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 6:20; Note, this study is not meant to deal with the various

contexts and different uses sometimes of words like soul and spirit). But it is clear, flesh does not have “will” in and of itself, no, not at all. Rather, it is one’s heart (i.e., one’s mind, soul, spirit, inward man) that determines one’s ultimate destiny (Mat. 22:37-40; Rom. 6:11-13). The body is not immortal. Flesh dies (Jam. 2:26). It is the spirit (or heart) of man that is immortal and does not die (Ecc. 12:7; Luke 24:43; Luke 24:46; Acts 7:59). But again, one might wonder, what does all of this have to do with the subject of hellfire and brimstone? More than one might realize!

FEELINGS

Emotion Only

As the above section demonstrated, man is a complex creature. He is not like animals. Animals do not have an immortal soul. Sure, they have animation, show affection, and even have unique traits and great intelligence. Without question, they can express feelings. Animals are an amazing part of God’s creation. But animals are not made after God’s image and they do not have an immortal soul—only man does (2 Pet. 2:12; Gen. 1:26-27; 1 The. 5:23; Mat. 25:46). When an animal dies, that animal is dead—period. After all, animals are well, animals, and we are even allowed to eat them (Acts 10:10-16; 1 Tim. 4:3b-5). Not so, with mankind, man is God’s special creation and absolutely lives after death (2 Sam. 12:23; Phi. 1:21-24; Luke 16:19f), and this is why man must hear solid preaching and teaching about death and about eternity—including clear lessons on Hell. Hebrews 9:27 tells us, “And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.” For the faithful Christian, death is gain (Phi. 1:21). Yes, death for those

“in Christ” is considered to be “far better” (Phi. 1:23; Eph. 1:3f; Rev. 14:13). But what of those not in the Lord? The answer is clear: Torment (Luke 16:19f; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). First, it will be torment in the Haden realm (the torment side; there is also a paradise side, Luke 23:43; Luke 16:19f), and then second, after the day of judgment, there will be everlasting torment in eternal hell (Gehenna)—Mark 9:43-48, Matthew 25:41, Matthew 25:46a, Jude 13, Revelation 20:11-15, Revelation 21:8. It might sound ironic, but to not preach on hellfire and brimstone would be unforgivable and cruel. **How can we not preach and teach on the terrible place called hell, when doing so helps men and women not to go there? True love would mandate that we so preach!** We must tell the unaware of the coming future (Mat. 7:13-14; Mat. 7:21-23; John 5:28-29; Mat. 25:41f). We need to love people enough to help them come to God and avoid Hell.

The purpose of life is well summarized by inspiration in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” What is the whole (the term duty is not in the original) of man? What does it involve? The inspired text declares, “Fear God, and keep his commandments.” Regarding pleasing God, notice how simple the solution—Fear...and Keep. Over and over this simple and understandable truth is taught in God’s Word. From Genesis 2:17 to Revelation 22:18-19, we learn that we are to fear and keep! Yes, God’s plan is simple. We are to fear and obey God (Deu. 6:2; Deu. 6:13; Deu. 6:24; Deu. 8:6; Deu. 10:12; 10:20; Deu. 17:13; Deu. 17:19; Deu. 28:58; Etc.). In fact, a correct study of God’s Holy Writ will

demonstrate that a proper fear and reverence for God leads to genuine and heartfelt repentance/obedience toward God, which in turn produces the ability not to fear—that is, the growth of soul wherein one needs not to be afraid, yet while, at the same time, always maintaining the proper respect toward God (Gen. 15:1; Psa. 23:4; Rom. 8:15; 2 Tim. 1:7; Heb. 2:15; Rev. 1:17). Thus, we must fear (Lev. 25:17; Psa. 33:8; Psa. 34:9; Psa. 115:13; Pro. 1:29; Mat. 10:28; Acts 13:16; Eph. 5:21; Heb. 4:1; 1 Pet. 2:17; Rev. 15:4) and then grow to the point where our faith matures into assurance and comfort. Again, at the same time, we must never lose our fear/respect for the almighty nature of our great and majestic God (Gen. 42:18; Exo. 18:21; Lev. 19:32; Mat. 10:31; Luke 12:32; Mat. 8:26; Mark 4:40; 1 John 4:18). As Romans 11:22 teaches us, we must always remember that God has both goodness and severity at His disposal and that He will use both as He rewards and punishes the obedient and disobedient, respectively. Yet, what is the point? What does fear (respect/awe) toward God that leads to obedience have to do with preaching and teaching on hell fire and brimstone? Perhaps, more importantly, why and how does such preaching save souls? The answer to such questions should be obvious, but to make sure it is not missed, here it is: **Hell fire and brimstone preaching produces fear (awe, respect) toward God because such preaching reminds the lost that God must be respected and that He will not overlook unforgiven sins, and this in turn leads the honest to repentance.** In other words, such preaching/teaching helps the sinner to see just how terrible sin really is, as well as helping them see the just nature of God in punishing sin. Just as a sinner must come to realize that

sin is transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), so that same sinner must likewise fully understand that his sin is actually against God Himself (Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:4). In short, people need to realize that sin is a serious thing! Even a Christian (i.e., a forgiven sinner) needs to constantly maintain his or her proper respect for the Almighty, forever realizing that walking in the light is necessary, and also that returning to a life of sin is terribly egregious (1 John 1:6-10; Acts 8:22-24; Heb.10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Again, this seems simple and easy to understand—straightforward. Yes, much of what Jesus and His inspired men taught was that way (Mat. 7:13-14; Mat. 7:21-27; Acts 17:30-31; Acts 24:25; Heb. 5:9). The problem, however, is that most people do not base their beliefs on the simple and easy to understand, rather they appeal to emotional arguments, feelings only and the like. Just as the ungodly in the days of Jesus often sought to “entangle him in his talk” (Mat. 22:15), so many today likewise use false arguments in order to dismiss God's truth, and chief among these trappings is the use of the emotional argument. The use of such methods (cf., 2 Cor. 2:11) are often used when discussing the topic of preaching/teaching on hellfire and brimstone. Such statements as, “Well, no one is perfect, including you” or “Afterall, everyone sins,” along with fallacious arguments like, “Preaching on sin/hell is harsh and unnecessary” or “You are just saying that my grandma went to Hell” or “Preaching on Sin/Hell just isn't what my ministry is about” readily demonstrate the point. Too often religious people appeal to their feelings (emotions only) in their attempt to determine truth. In short, they use emotions to drive their logic, instead of letting proper logic (based on God's Word – Truth!) drive

their emotions. Sadly, even many in the church often do the same thing. Statements like, “It’s not what you say, but how you say it,” or “Raising your voice comes across too harsh,” or “Don’t be so judgmental” and the like are often heard among even the brethren. Why? While it is true that some might be wrongfully mean-spirited and caustic, the truth of the matter is that God will judge the bad hearts. However, as a whole it seems that such sentiments typically are the reflection of those who use emotions to guide their way. Afterall, who determines what is or isn’t harsh or how loud a raised voice can be? With far too many, it’s as the young girl who once said of her sister, with an eye roll, “Whew, she is so emotional.” Likewise, individuals who lead with emotion seem to also sometimes be dramatic. In our house, we often refer to this state as being “dra-motional.” Not a true word, but one gets the point. We must not base our beliefs about any Bible topic on “emotion only,” but rather on what God’s Word teaches (John 17:17; John 8:32; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Truth And Emotion

As an old preacher once put it, “Truth is truth and will be truth regardless of any man’s ignorance of it or attitude toward it.” What a great statement! Truth is determined by God, in His Word. As Psalm 119:142 says, “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and [God’s] law is the truth.” Therefore, any determination regarding preaching/teaching or not preaching/teaching on the topic of hellfire and brimstone must be determined not by the subjective and everchanging feelings of fickle individuals, but by the reliable and unmovable teaching

found within God's inspired and all-sufficient Word (Psa. 119:104-105). But let's analyze this concept deeper; namely that of emotion only vs. logic (with emotion). Without fully studying Aristotle and his classifications of ethos, pathos and logos (based on Greek words), it is fair to say that **God understood such things long before Aristotle!** Note, 1) **Ethos** (arguing from one's position based on who the speaker is) can be seen in John 7:47-49 (cf., also, John 18:22; John 19:10), 2) **Pathos** (arguing based on appealing to one's emotions/feelings) can be seen in John 19:12 (cf., also, Mat. 15:12; Mat. 27:40; Luke 7:39), 3) **Logos** (arguing from logic or reasoning) can be seen in countless areas (cf., all of the arguments of Jesus; other inspired arguments) such as in Luke 20 or Matthew 12. This is not to say that teaching or obeying Bible truths involve no emotion. In fact, that is far from correct, as our early discussion of the Biblical heart demonstrated (Mark 3:5; Eph. 4:26; Exo. 32:19; Num. 25:6-11; John 2:13-17; Mark 11:15-18; Cf., also Deu. 4:29; Psa. 111:1; Psa. 119:10; Mat. 22:37; Rom. 6:17; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 14:15, Etc.). However, emotions (and emotional arguments) must not drive the decisions of man! Rather, proper reasoning/logic, coupled with true faith must do such (Isa. 1:18; Rom. 10:17). Man's reasoning alone cannot save him, any more than emotion only makes something right. Proverbs 14:12 and Jeremiah 10:23 clearly show that mankind must rely upon God's Word to understand which way to go in this life and thankfully God has provided His pattern to us (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; John 12:48; Rev. 20:11-15). God has given humanity a choice in accepting or rejecting His way (Mat. 11:28-30; Rev. 3:20; Rev. 22:17). This choice involves proper reasoning (cf., the logos noted

above) with God's Word (Eph. 5:17; Psa. 47:7 with Eph. 5:19; 1 The. 5:21). This proper reasoning with God's Word develops faith (trust) in God which is absolutely essential to salvation (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6). At this point one might say, "Okay, okay, I get it. Faith (rightly reasoned belief/trust – not logos based on human wisdom, but logos based on God's Word connected with proper thinking/understanding) comes from Scripture. Also, I understand that faith cannot come from emotion only (pathos) nor can it come from a person's being/position (ethos), either. But what does this have to do with our preaching/teaching and the topic of hellfire and brimstone?" **A ton!**

We are required to preach "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Like the Apostle Paul, we are to keep "back nothing that [is] profitable" (Acts 20:20). In fact, if one is to please God, it is required that we "abide in the doctrine of Christ," and certainly this would imply—all of it (2 John 9-11; John 16:13; Jude 3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 16:16-18). And "all of it" certainly would include teaching/preaching on what God has to say about hellfire and brimstone. Yet, our modern society, as a whole, wants nothing to do with that which condemns or points out sin. The thought of teaching on "hard things" and offending others or in some way suggesting that they should follow God and not live according to themselves has become taboo. In truth, this tolerant, don't offend anyone at all-costs mindset (including even "how" we speak) has even influenced the Lord's church. We are not talking about styles, per se, because we all understand that styles, tone, personalities and so forth will always be diverse, and thus liberty and mercy should be extended with such, because after all, even the apostles

and saints of the first century were all different in style and personality (Acts 15:36-41; cf., Peter vs. Paul, Etc.). But that is not what is under consideration. Unbelievably, we have now come to the point in society (and often in the church) where even a “raised voice” or “how you say it” is mocked and condemned as mean-spirited, harsh and unacademic. And we’re not just talking about the rank liberals only. To such thinking we ask, really? Have these same critics ever (under any circumstance) raised their voice to make a point or give emphasis? We would dare say “yes.” The very idea that changing tone—in and of itself—is always unacceptable, is ludicrous. Certainly, as God’s people, we fully believe that “a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Pro. 15:1) and that we should be “...kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven [us].” But does not the same non-contradicting Book say that preachers are to, “...speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let[ting] no man despise thee” (Tit. 2:15)? Does not the Sacred Text equally command elders to hold “fast the faithful word...[and] by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers?” (Tit. 1:9). In fact, does this same passage not go on and say that these types of false teachers have “mouths [that] must be stopped?” (Tit. 1:11). Actually, the same inspired chapter later adds, “... rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. 1:13). Question: How loud—seriously, we need the exact tone (acceptable facial expressions would be nice, too) is allowable, when “sharply” rebuking or “stopping their mouths?” Crazy, right? Sadly, no. We now have some actually challenging godly men on their “tone.” Give us a

break. Such nonsense is understandable in society and in denominational circles, but among brethren? Tragically, such rubbish is believed among us and just as the only person not liked is the one who condemns sin, so it is often likewise with the “stronger styles” today. The sentiment seems to be, “Whisper me a sermon preacher and I’ll think you’re great, as long as you don’t raise your voice and sound like it’s a debate.” For the record, whispering is fine, and sometimes very needed; But so is raising the voice (1 Kin. 19:12; John 11:43; Acts 16:28). Let us just preach the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)! Notice, it does not say, “But speaking the truth softly,” nor does it demand, “in a shout.” No, it demands that we preach/teach out of a heart of love/agape! For the record, preaching the “truth in love” (agape) involves always seeks the highest good. Likewise, it involves keeping God’s commandments (2 John 6). Thus, both (agape and commandment keeping) point to the necessity of preaching/teaching on every subject, and this would absolutely include making things plain on hellfire and brimstone, as part of fulfilling the mandate to instruct in the “whole counsel of God.” As to the exact style—working within one’s personality, having a good heart, considering the circumstances, using wisdom and the like will prove most helpful (Acts 15:36f; Mark 10:21; Jude 22-23; Col. 4:6).

Along this same line, it should also be noted that many today (although it is not a new thing) seem to promote “academia” to the exclusion of truth, or at least in such a way as to make truth secondary. Not always (note, there have certainly been good and faithful brethren with various “academic hides” on the wall, throughout the years), but

often this same “tamer is always better methodology” is connected with the more “secularly academic.” This mindset has certainly influenced many within our very topic. Concerning hell, the false teaching on annihilation (i.e., that hellfire is not real or eternal, but rather that the wicked are punished by simply ceasing to exist) is believed by many in the religious world and unbelievably has even influenced some within the Lord’s church. Never mind the clear teaching found in Mark 9:43, Matthew 25:46 and Jude 7 about hell and its eternal nature, especially as connected with fire, punishment and torment. Sadly, with some, “academia” and “scholarship” seem to trump truth. If one does not believe it, just think about all of the congregations that will not even interview a preacher unless he holds a certain type of diploma in his hand. Such should never be the case among God’s people (John 8:31-32; Acts 4:13). College degrees (including masters and doctorate degrees) do not impress the Lord (1 Cor. 1:17-31; 1 Cor. 2)! It is interesting, is it not, that almost all modern secular educational colleges/universities had their beginning based on the teachings of One who did not even have any “formal” education (John 7:15-16). No, we are not condemning secular education and degrees. After all, Paul was a very educated man. But Jesus was a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and some of His key men were fishermen (Mark 1:16f). Here is the point: True education is found in knowing and properly applying God’s Word (2 Pet. 1:3; Acts 18:26). If a man/woman has a degree or two or three, that is fine. But never let such a person think that his “degrees” or that man’s “scholarship” surpasses “the real scholarship”—properly understanding/applying God’s

Word” (Eph. 5:17; Psa. 119:104-105; Isa. 5:20; Isa. 8:20; Mat. 23:1-12). And certainly one without a degree or with five degrees can understand that preaching/teaching on hellfire and brimstone is required, and when properly done, it does save souls (2 Cor. 5:10-11; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:25; Mat. 25:41; Mat. 25:46).

FUNDAMENTALS

The Basics

The topic of hellfire and brimstone is certainly a Biblical topic. In fact, it is a basic topic and Jesus speaks of Hell (and fire) more than anyone. In Matthew 5:22 our loving Lord says, “...but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of **hell fire**.” In Matthew 18:9, our same spotless Savior declares, “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into **hell fire**.” In Mark 9:43 the Messiah said, “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **hell**, into the **fire** that never shall be quenched (cf., also, Mark 9:45; Mark 9:47). Concerning brimstone, the Bible is also replete with references (Gen. 19:24; Deu. 29:23; Psa. 11:6; Isa. 30:33; Isa. 34:9; Eze. 38:22; Luke 17:29; Rev. 14:10; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:10; Rev. 21:8; Etc.). In Scripture, brimstone is connected with fire and burning. In fact, while other Scriptures certainly describe the place, the actual term Hell (Gehenna – a word which refers to the final abode/suffering/torment of the wicked after the judgment and comes from a background connected with the burning and smoke from the valley of Hinnom) is used twelve times

in the New Testament. It is used once by James (Jam. 3:6) and the other eleven times it is used by Jesus (Note, hades (the realm of the dead/abode of unseen spirits, both good and bad) and Gehenna are not the same, although both are translated Hell in the King James Version). In Matthew 10:28 Jesus reminds us that one should not fear mankind, but instead God, because it is God that has the ability to forever destroy in hell (Gehenna). Without debate this is the same place being described in Matthew 25:41. That passage reads, “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.” Additional description is given to such a place in Jude vs. 7 (Note, this is describing torment within the haden realm for those wicked souls from Sodom and Gomorrah, presently, but certainly, Gehenna [eternal hell fire] will be like it and even worse).

The Flaws

Our society (like all societies) is not the standard for determining truth. Thinking that opinions of society (any society) determine truth constitutes flawed thinking, indeed. Truth is found in, and only in God’s Holy Book (1 Pet. 4:11; 2 John 9-11; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). We must not let the feelings and wacky thoughts of men (even religious men) influence what we believe (Jer. 10:23; Pro. 14:12; 2 Tim. 3:13; Mat. 7:21-23). Legions will be the number who detest fundamental Bible truths and hard straight-forward Bible preaching/teaching (John 3:19-21; John 7:7; John 15:22). Especially will this be true when specifics are nuanced and direct challenges are made against worldliness (Jam. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:14; Mat. 5:10-12). When

Gospel preachers boldly expose the wickedness of the modern dance (cf., prom), immodesty of cheerleading/mixed swimming, covetousness connected with buying lottery tickets, sorry state of social drinking, pitiful nature of man-made religion (cf., denominationalism and false world-religions), filth of lust/fornication (all types) and the like, we should realize that most will not like it (Mat. 7:13-14; 1 John 2:15-17). **The same concept is equally true when it comes to preaching clear, direct, and pointed sermons on hell, especially if the lesson/sermon involves thunderous preaching and motivational confrontation.** Yes, the ridicule will likely come, “Oh, he’s just a hellfire and brimstone preacher. He’s just trying to scare people and make them feel guilty.” But the truth is this: If you are a man/woman of God, then you better love the lost enough to teach them the truth, even on hard subjects, like Jesus did (Mark 10:21). The sinner **does** need to feel guilt. Worldly individuals do need to be scared. Not of you, but of God (Heb. 12:28-29; Phi. 2:12). **It is certainly not our job to be hateful or caustic, but it is our job as Christians (especially as preachers/teachers, Tit. 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5) to boldly proclaim the message of God (including truths on hell) so that, like Jesus—who taught more on hell than anyone—the “common people” will hear us “gladly” (Mark 12:37).** Of course, we should watch our motives and always remember the words of 2 Timothy 2:24-26 and gently work with those that “oppose themselves,” but we must also realize that our example, Jesus, did so with differing styles and methods, but all of it was with true love for the lost (Mat. 9:36; Mat. 12:34; Mat. 23:1f; Luke 13:32; Cf., also, 1 Kin. 18:27; Mat. 3:7; Acts 20:31; 2 Cor.

12:20-21; 2 Cor. 13:2). When Elijah confronted Ahab, he was not trying to be a troubler (nor was he), but preaching boldly certainly got him accused of such (1 Kin. 18:17-18). Matthew 15:10-14 is strong medicine against the false notion that “it’s not what you say, but how you say it, that truly matters.” Was Jesus perfect? Did He always say the perfect thing? Absolutely! Yet, there were still some that got offended at His preaching/teaching. What did Christ do about it? Did he wring His hands and apologize for His approach? Did He eat Himself up with worry about His methodology and the tone in His voice or the parsing of a sentence? Did our Lord go read some of the theologians of the day (like so many among our number do on a daily basis) and learn about denominational leadership concepts so He would learn not to offend? Nope! When His disciples came to Him and said, “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?,” Jesus immediately (and without apology) declared, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Truth does not need to be apologized for! Additionally, strong preaching does not need to be apologized for either. Again, styles vary. If one’s style involves lecture and a conversational tone, then by all means, use it to the glory of God. On the other hand, if one “shouts a little,” then that should be used to motivate the lost and praise God (after all, Jesus is not opposed to the shout, Luke 23:46; John 11:43; 1 The. 4:16). If a preacher/teacher has a bad attitude, God will deal with him. In fact, such a person should repent and get another profession. Preaching/teaching is about loving the

lost and helping them find the Lord. It involves proclaiming in every way – soft voice, medium voice, loud voice, no voice (cf., sign language) God’s Word on every topic—and this includes plain Bible (B.C.V. – Book, Chapter, Verse) teaching, including on hellfire and brimstone. When this is done, with a heart for the lost and without apology, souls can be saved (2 Cor. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:12-17; 1 Cor. 9:16-23a).

FAITH

Fear of God

While perhaps simplistic, God has two great motivators—fear and love. Romans 11:22 tells us of “the goodness and severity of God.” Concerning love, Romans 2:4 teaches us that God’s love is a tremendous and wonderful motivator when it says that the “goodness of God” leads to repentance. A right-thinking sinner will see the love of John 3:16 or Romans 5:6-10 and long for God and His plan. 1 John 4:8 tells us that “God is love.” A verse earlier, the same inspired writer noted that “love is of God.” He is our Father! He loves us and wants what is best for us—every time (Deu. 6:24; Deu. 10:13). Yet, as our Father, God will not (and cannot) overlook/tolerate unrepented of and thus unforgiven sin. Truly, love (i.e., Biblical love, not the false concept of “#love” spewed in our modern society) is a great motivator for the sinner in wanting to come to God. **Yet, there is another. It is fear.** The term fear is used hundreds of times in the Bible. It does not take much research to realize that God uses fear to motivate and that mankind should reverence and respect Him. God is majestic, holy and almighty. As Malachi 1:6 reminds us, “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father,

where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts....” Jeremiah 5:22 adds, “Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence....” While it is true that faithful Christians need not fear (Rom. 8:15; Rev. 1:17), in another sense, it is also true that all (including Christians) must fear, lest they forget the greatness of God and the nature of eternity (Phi. 2:12; Heb. 12:29; 2 The. 1:8). Therefore, preaching/teaching about hellfire and brimstone is necessary and it saves souls, because such instruction reminds people (in and out of the church) about who God is, what eternity is about and that all have a choice. In fact, preaching and teaching about hell involves both love and fear. Such education properly shows God’s love for humanity in trying to keep them out of such a place as hell. In other words, clarity about hell—that is, clear teaching/preaching on hellfire and brimstone (and even in a “hellfire and brimstone manner,” whatever that means) while to some seems harsh, to the rational mind, it motives men to fear God, as well as to see His love. We must remember that hell was not created for humanity. God does not want humans to go there (2 Pet. 3:9). No, it was created for “the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:41). Yet, due to the creation of mankind with free-will (note this was because of God’s love), man had/has the choice to obey or not obey. Likewise, due to God’s ultimate love, Jesus (cf., Deity, the second person of the Godhead) came so that no sinful/guilty person need stay that way. Jesus provided a way back to God (1 John 2:1-2; John 14:6; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:16; Rom. 6:1f). Therefore, the world, religious community and even liberal brethren can rant and rave all they want, **but the truth is that we, like God,**

must love folks enough to tell them about hell—so that they do not have to go there (Mat. 9:36-38; 2 Cor. 5:11). Just as God uses two things—love and fear to motivate, so we should likewise remember that two things also show how bad sin really is, namely: 1) It took the death of Jesus/ God (not the Father, not the Spirit, but the Son – John 1:1f; Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9; Heb. 10:5) to remit our sins, and 2) Hell awaits all who die in sin (John 8:24; Mark 16:16). Now that is sobering! It also shows, that just as we need to preach often and continuous on Christ and the cross, so we should likewise not neglect hellfire and brimstone preaching, because that too, saves souls (i.e., in motivating the lost to fear/avoid hell and to come to Jesus for salvation, through repentance and obedience to the gospel).

Obedience Matters

Contrary to popular opinion, obedience is required if one is to please God (Heb. 5:9; Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46). As was noted earlier, fear and obedience (commandment keeping) are often connected (2 The. 1:7-9). In truth, fear (when understood properly) leads to obedience (Psa. 111:10; Pro. 23:17). It did with Noah. This fact is made abundantly clear in the book of Hebrews, chapter eleven. Hebrews 11:7 tells us, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” This incredible verse teaches us that **faith, fear and obedience (commandment keeping) are forever connected**. A penman once wrote an article entitled, “Christians aren’t rule keepers,” and must have forgotten this verse.

What a ridiculous title! After all, what are rules? They are commandments/requirements. Can we imagine a sound man using a title like, “Christians aren’t commandment keepers?” We hope not—read John 14:15! But back to Noah. The text says that all Noah did was by faith. That’s critical. But in view of our topic (hell fire), consider the next part, “...being warned of God of things not seen as yet...” Noah was warned. Really? Absolutely! Who warned Noah? God! About what? About “things not seen as yet.” What happened when this man of faith was “warned of God of things not seen as yet...?” The Bible says, “...he moved with fear...” What did this “fear” motivate him to do? It motivated him to obey! There we have it. A warning, yeah, a warning from God Himself. A warning about “things not seen as yet,” that produced fear and then action (cf., preaching on hell)! Again, what did this warning do? It produced motivation. Motivation, based on what? Motivation based on fear. What resulted? Action/True Faith! **In other words, it was Noah’s faith (trust/belief) in God, based on his fear (concern, respect, awe, understanding of who God was) that motivated him to do what God said do in the way God said to do it—in other words, this fear/faith prompted Noah to obey/be saved.** If this text/inspired illustration from a true event does not correlate to our topic about the necessity of preaching/teaching on hellfire and brimstone (and perhaps in a manner or style so as to motivate the lost), then perhaps we will not find one.

CONCLUSION

Preaching on hell, as well as preaching in such a way as to motivate men and women to avoid it seems to be

a dying thing within religion, and tragically within the Lord's church, as well. Again, there is not a perfect way to preach/teach and styles differ as widely as personalities and intellects, and this is a good thing. But the necessity to preach/teach on hell and the criticality of using specific hard-hitting motivation-oriented preaching (whether it be from a whisper or a shout) must not die among us. As long as men keep sinning (and they will, Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23), they will need to be taught and motivated back to God (Acts 18:4-5; Acts 19:26; Acts 17:6; Acts 24:25; Acts 26:28). May we find our friends before and after we enter the classroom/pulpit, but may we always (in and out of the pulpit) find God, our true friend, each time we are expounding His glorious Word (2 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 4:16-17; Rom. 1:16-17). Preaching on hellfire and brimstone and/or preaching in a strong and motivational (and sometimes even in a confrontational way) will not impress man (including some of our own brethren), but that should not surprise us (1 Cor. 1:18f; 1 Cor. 3:18-21; Gal. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:37; John 12:48). It would do some well to study Matthew 11:7-11, Luke 1:15-17 and Matthew 16:13-14 and compare perhaps the usual and recognized style of John, Jesus and Elijah. Heaven and hell are coming. Let us love souls and always "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim. 4:2). Write about it, whisper it, shout it, do whatever it takes, but let us never forget that, "**Hellfire & Brimstone Preaching Saves Souls!**" May the weak-kneed, spineless and politically correct (i.e., those who won't, under any circumstances, call names or deal with specific sins) preacher types decrease, and may the tell-it-like-it-is, Bible toting, Bible quoting, unafraid of societies pressure types (whether they be loud or quiet

in their nature) increase. Just as any loving father would warn his child about the dangers of the busy street or hot stove, so we must warn the wicked about hell (Eze. 3:17f; Acts 20:20f).

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The Evolution Of Modesty And The Unchanging Word

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Several years ago, on a Sunday morning, just before worship services started, I was talking to several young people sitting in the “youth group section” at the front of the church building. While I was talking to them, one of the teenage boys, gathered up his Bible, politely excused himself, and went and sat by himself at the far end of the pew. I didn’t know what had happened. I wondered if someone had offended him or made him mad, so when I went over to where he was sitting and asked, “What’s wrong?” His response shocked me on several levels. He said, “Look down there were I was sitting and look at the way the girls are dressed. Tell me how I could possibly sit there with them and have my mind on worship?” Do you see why I was shocked? Not many teenage boys would have the boldness to act on their convictions. And, as I looked at the other end of the pew, I had to agree with this young man’s observation.

It was at that very moment that I decided, that I

needed to address the topic of modesty. The purpose of that sermon was not to embarrass or shame anyone, but it was to bring our lives into conformity with the Word of God.

Preaching on modesty is a delicate matter. While human sexuality is a Bible topic, it is also a very sensitive topic. And, as I did then when I preached on this topic, I will do the same today, and that is, I will assure you that I am aware that this is a mixed assembly with regard to gender as well as age and will do my best to speak as clearly as I can while remaining in the realm of what I believe is appropriate and polite.

Several years ago, when I decided to preach this sermon on the topic of modesty, out of curiosity, I went online to a database that contained over 150,000 sermons. That's fifteen hundred years of preaching twice on Sunday. I wanted to see how many sermons on the topic of modesty were in their database. Would you like to guess how many sermons they had archived on the topic of modesty? Seven! Just seven sermons out of 150,000 sermons addressed the topic of modesty. Just seven sermons on modesty out of what amounted to more than 1,500 years' worth of weekly sermons! Judging from their sermon archives, either modesty is not an issue in our culture, or preachers are reluctant to preach on this topic and congregations are satisfied with their silence.

I could easily join the crowd and say nothing about this Bible topic. However, if I did, I would be unfaithful as a preacher. Someday, I want to be able to stand before God and say as did the apostle Paul, "For

I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27). Modesty is as much a biblical issue as baptism or the Lord’s Supper. Would we idly sit by in our churches and watch as God’s truth on baptism or worship was hijacked or discarded? Surely not. Then why would we idly sit back in our churches and witness God’s truth on modesty being ignored? If I were to lack the love and courage to speak the truth in season and out of season, then I would need to step down out of this pulpit. In order to be faithful to God and true to my vocation, I must be willing to “reprove” and “rebuke” as well as “praise” and “edify” the body of Christ.

Today, I ask that you give me your ear. I ask that you listen with an open and honest heart. I ask that you not try to justify and defend yourself, but rather justify God and defend His holiness and His high standard for our lives.

Brethren, we have an unspoken problem in our congregations. It’s unspoken, but it’s not a hidden problem, for we all see it. We just haven’t said much about it, and I suspect that is due to the sensitive nature of the problem. You see, we have a problem with modesty. If I can illustrate that problem by referencing a fairy tale, I will do so.

Do you remember reading or having read to you a fairy tale by Hans Christian Anderson entitled “The Emperor’s New Clothes?” According to the story, there was once an emperor who loved beautiful clothes. He spent a small fortune on fine clothes. He loved to parade around his kingdom, showing off his fine clothes

to his subjects. One day, two swindlers came to his kingdom and told the emperor that they were weavers and claimed to know how to make the finest cloth imaginable. Not only were the colors and the patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but in addition, this material had the amazing property that it was invisible to anyone who was incompetent or foolish.

The emperor thought how wonderful it would be to have clothes made from that cloth. Then he could know which of his men were unfit for their positions, and he would be able to discern between the wise and the unwise. So, the emperor paid these two swindlers a great sum of money to weave him some clothes from this cloth.

The day finally arrived that the clothes were completed. But because everyone knew that it had been said that only the “unwise” could not see the clothes, they all pretended to see the emperor’s new clothes. Even the emperor himself. So, the emperor put on his new clothes and paraded down the streets of his kingdom. While everyone could see that the emperor was naked, no one wanted to be viewed as being foolish, so they pretended to see the King’s new clothes. Finally, the emperor walked by a little child, and the child looked at the emperor and said, “The King doesn’t have any clothes on!” Then one by one, the people came to their senses and agreed with the child that the emperor was indeed naked.

The intent of this lesson is to verbalize what we’ve all been thinking to ourselves but have been reluctant to say openly. The truth that so many of you have

witnessed, and have whispered about in your pews, and have talked about in hushed tones on your way home or to lunch so that the children don't hear, needs to be spoken aloud. The pretending has gone on long enough. Henry Van Til, a former professor of Bible at Calvin College once observed that, "Culture is religion externalized" (Til 200). By this he meant that the culture of a nation reflects the true faith of that people. The way people live, talk, dress, and work all reflect the standards and priorities of the people.

Along that same line of thought, I would like to suggest that "dress is also religion externalized." Cultures that are enslaved to material possessions tend to fall prey to an enslavement to high fashion. Cultures that treasure sensuality tend to dress immodestly. And cultures which embrace true Christian piety will seek to make personal holiness the driving standard for their dress code. In short, what I'm trying to say is that "dress is not neutral." It speaks, and it speaks volumes.

The way people dress reveals much about their character, what they value, and what they are pursuing and trying to achieve. Some people dress in a way that speaks "success." In fact, our society has coined the phrase "dressed for success" to describe a specific type of clothing (Mat. 11:8). The Bible provides us an example of dress that makes a religious statement (2 Sam. 3:31; 14:2; Mat. 11:21). Sackcloth was worn to proclaim one's penitence and humility before God. The Bible even records for us that clothing makes a moral statement as well. Solomon spoke of putting on the "clothes of a harlot" (Pro. 7:10; Gen. 3:15).

Some clothing not only speaks “sexuality,” but it screams it! Clothing designers have all but stolen the innocence of childhood. Little girls wear under-garments as well as outer-garments that have caused our society to coin the phrase “prostitots.” Do we really want our six-year old girls dressing “sexy?” And fathers, do you really want your daughters to be ogled by hormone driven young men because your daughter’s clothing teases and tantalizes their lusts? And as we look around, or when you go to the mall, just take a minute and watch the people as they walk by. What kind of message are they conveying? Success? Religion? Morality? Rebellion?

As you are sitting here today, your dress speaks. Those around you are listening to your dress and are logically and legitimately drawing conclusions about your character. My question is, when one listens to our dress, are they getting a message that is consistent with our profession?

I never cease to be amazed at the irony of some who lament the fact that they aren’t taken seriously and are simply treated as little more than a sex object, or they resent being treated, not as a person, but as a thing. Yet these same people often dress suggestively and sensuously.

I think we all recognize the maxim which states, “Your actions speak louder than your words.” This truth is born out in the way we dress. People can profess godliness and Christian virtue all they want with their words, but if their dress professes sensuality and provocativeness, people will not hear their words, they will hear their dress.

I understand that modesty is a controversial issue. No matter how one approaches the subject, he will be judged a legalist by some, or a libertarian by others. However, I assure you that my objective is not controversy, nor is it to bind my scruples or opinions on you. If you think I am about to get out a ruler and tell you how many inches constitute too short or too low-cut, you're mistaken. Even the Lord did not do that as he addressed this topic through the inspired apostle Paul. What he did, however, was teach us the purpose of clothing and the message our clothing ought to send. I think one of the problems we have with dress today is that we seem to have forgotten the fundamental purpose of it. Clothing was intended by God, to be worn to "cover" our bodies and to "hide" our nakedness (Gen. 3:21). However, today many wear clothing to "expose" their bodies, draw attention to parts of the body that entice, tantalize, and excite the imagination. That misses the God-ordained purpose of clothing.

Therefore, let's go back to the beginning. When God created Adam and Eve in the beginning, they were "both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). They felt no sense of public disgrace or humiliation. However, after they succumbed to sin, their eyes were opened, having an awareness of shame, so they sewed fig leaves together to make a covering for themselves (Gen. 3:7). This covering they made would be akin to what we would call a "girdle" (Gesenius 260) or "loin covering" (BDB 292). God looked at their situation, and their feeble attempt to cover themselves, then killed animals and

fashioned coats or tunics of skin to adequately, and more permanently cover them.

Although we have no “snapshots” of Adam and Eve’s apparel, the Hebrew word “coat” or “tunic” refers to a long shirt-like garment (Pollard 25). The point is, God’s expectation was quite different than man’s. Man offered as a covering for himself that which was insufficient, so God intervened and clothed them Himself. I don’t think mankind has changed much from the days of our original parents. We are still dressing ourselves inadequately, and if God were to intervene, He would surely put more clothes on us. Not only does this passage address the issue of modesty, but it is rich with theological and redemptive truths.

As one comes to the New Testament, he can read Paul’s instructions regarding our dress. In 1 Timothy 2:9-10, Paul instructs women to “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety [KJV - shamefacedness] and moderation...that which is proper for women professing godliness and good works.” I suppose at this point we need to define some terms.

The term “modesty” is a broad concept not limited to a sexual connotation. In fact, in this context, it is addressing the problem of over-dressing. Modest has the general meaning of respectable, and honorable, having a regard for decency of behavior or dress (Knight 133). The term “propriety” or “shamefacedness” denotes a sense of shame that would cause one to shrink from trespassing the boundaries of what is modest (Hendriksen 106). The person Paul describes here is not one who tries to walk a fine line between modesty

and immodesty, but rather shrinks in shame from the possibility of being immodest.

To summarize these terms, one could say that the way one dresses should not draw attention to themselves in the wrong way. One's dress should not say "Sex" or "Pride" or "Riches," but rather "Purity," "Humility," and "Moderation." You say you can't dress that way and be cool? You say you can't dress that way and have friends, get dates, and fit in? My question is of what concern should "fitting in with the world" have to do with a Christian, and the choices he or she makes?

Paul literally begged us not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2). Are we really so shallow and undisciplined that we are more concerned about what our friends think, than what our Lord thinks? Modesty is not first an issue of clothing, rather, it is an issue of the heart. And if one's heart is right with God, it will govern one's dress in purity and shamefacedness.

Modesty is not a "female" issue, but a human issue. Brothers and sisters, cover yourself, and do so in a way that doesn't draw attention to your sexuality, but rather to your purity. Don't wear clothing that teases, tantalizes, or that shows just enough flesh to arouse one's curiosity or imagination. Don't dress in such a fashion that leaves others wondering if you want to be chased, but rather confirms to us that you want to be chaste. Surely, none of us want to be a stumbling block that could trip up others. But I assure you that if your dress does not profess godliness, that is exactly what you are. I appeal to you to act in love toward others and seek their best interests.

Someone might say, “That’s all well and good, but how do you define modesty and immodesty? Isn’t it a cultural matter? The answer to that question is, “yes,” and “no.”

Culture does have a role in determining what is and what is not modest. Different cultures have different standards or definitions of modesty. This is born out in God’s Word. Do you remember the story of Tamar? The text says that Tamar took off her widow’s garments (notice there was dress that indicated she was a widow) and covered herself with a veil. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot because her face was covered by the veil (Gen. 38:14-15). However, culture changed by the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians. For Paul said that for a woman not to wear a veil was a shame and a sign of an unchaste woman (1 Cor. 11:5-6).

So then, if modesty differs from time to time and culture to culture, how are we to define what is or is not immodest? Is it subjective? The answer is two-fold:

First, respect your cultural norms. If a certain type or style of clothing is seen as immoral, immodest, or indecent, avoid such clothing. If a culture thought that wearing red clothing was a sign of indecency, Christians in that culture should avoid such clothing. Even though there is nothing inherently sinful about the color red, Christians should be sensitive to the culture in which they live (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Second, let the unchanging word of God serve as your unchanging standard. While cultures may vary from time to time and from place to place, we still have a constant, unchanging record of what God provided a

man and a woman to remove their shame and modestly cover themselves.

The tunic that God gave Adam and Eve in the beginning was a garment that was intended to cover their nakedness and went from the shoulders to at least the knees. This was God's remedy for immodesty, even before culture ever existed.

Brethren, I close this lesson with an appeal to love. I appeal that we act in love toward one another, and most importantly, we act in love toward our Heavenly Father. May we "shrink" from any dress or conduct that is seen as indecent or immodest that fails to profess godliness.

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The Political Platform Of Jesus

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His leadership changed the world. As his dying body stretched diagonally across a bed in an inn opposite Ford's Theater, his Secretary of War & once-bitter rival Edwin M. Stanton observed, "There lies the greatest ruler of men this world has ever seen." He achieved unity for his nation and liberty for slaves, although his fullest fruits followed his death. At the height of the conflict when questioned about whether God was on his side, President Abraham Lincoln spoke profoundly: "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

Who is on the Lord's side?

Christians often sing, "He's my Savior, He's my King." Is He? Really?

Jesus came to be King. Prophecy foretold His throne and His kingdom (2 Sam. 7:13; Dan. 2:44, KJV). He would be "ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2), and "the government" would "be on His shoulders" (Isa. 9:6). Descended from Jewish royalty (Mat. 1:1-17), He was born to be King

(Luke 2:31-33; Mat. 2:1-2). Rejected by Jewish hierarchy (Mark 15:9-11), He was killed to be King (John 19:19; Heb. 2:9). Having defeated death through His resurrection, He was shown to be King (Luke 24:46; Acts 2:32-36). Before ascending to His heavenly throne, He declared His sovereignty: “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 28:18).

Jesus is King, but how many can truly sing, “He’s my King” To call Him King, to laud Him as Lord, requires upholding His principles and policies: why call Him Lord and not do what He says (Luke 6:46)? To oppose His position means singing a different tune. In a world where defiance is chic and in a nation where political dissenters have rebranded President’s Day as Not My President’s Day, how many call Jesus King with their mouths, yet the lives they lead and the sins they support tell a dissenting story: “Not my King”?

Who is on the Lord’s side?

“The Political Platform of Jesus”-the title alone risks ruffled feathers, but it need not be so. This study can unite rather than divide, but only if both author and audience focus on Jesus over politics:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2).

King Jesus sits at the Father’s right hand: are all eyes on Him?

Politics tends to be a divisive and dirty topic, aptly located in the dictionary between “polarize” and “pollute.”

Groucho Marx cynically called it “the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies.” Jay Leno comically quipped, “Politics is just show business for ugly people.” Political chats often bring fighting if there is disagreement, fuming if there is agreement over “bad news,” or fear if there is agreement over “good news,” for political “good news” seldom goes far enough or lasts long enough, and “bad news” is sure to follow. Insofar as politics entails facades, appeasements, scandals, lobbyists, and backroom deals, President Taft’s words still resonate: “Politics makes me sick.”

Negative connotations aside, politics is the “art or science of government” or “activities or affairs of a government, politician, or political party” (“Politics”). Since politics deals with government power, and since “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1), meant to protect the good (Rom. 13:3-4), punish the wicked (Rom. 13:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:13-14), and promote a peaceable lifestyle that is “good and acceptable in the sight of God” (1 Tim. 2:1-3), saints should view politics with high esteem and lofty expectations, disappointing politicians notwithstanding.

“The Political Platform of Jesus.” The word “political” deals with “the study, structure, or affairs of government” (“Political”). A “platform” is “a floor or horizontal surface raised above the level of the adjacent area, as a... stage for public speaking,” and has come to describe a “formal declaration of principles” (“Platform”). The term “political platform” has been called a “set of principles, goals, and strategies designed to address pressing political issues” (Costly).

This is a study of platforms, not individual politicians.

Not every politician embraces each plank of a party platform, and Christians must do diligence to determine where candidates stand on the matters that matter to Jesus. This is no effort to win votes for any political party, for parties shift positions like NASCAR drivers shift gears: whenever needed to get ahead. Morality does not change: parties do. The party with a morally superior platform fifty years ago, thirty years ago, or even today, will not necessarily be tomorrow's morally upright choice.

Did Jesus have a "political platform"? Did He give an ideological foundation to guide His people regarding affairs of government? What "principles, goals, and strategies" would Jesus endorse, and what would He consider to be "pressing political issues"?

The politics of Jesus' day constantly overlapped the events of His life. He was a political target in infancy, taken to Egypt as a foreign refugee (Mat. 2:13-16). He faced ceaseless debates from the Jews' politico-religious elite, the Pharisees (Mat. 5:20; Mat. 9:11; Mat. 22:15; Mat. 23:2). His power captured political interest (Luke 9:7-9), His preaching condemned political iniquity (Luke 13:31-32), and His prosecution connected political enemies (Luke 23:12). After He fed 5000 with five loaves and two fishes, some wanted to thrust Him into political office, desiring to "take Him by force, to make Him a king" (John 6:15). Jesus drew political ire because His teachings had political ramifications: even His assassination conspiracy was motivated by Jewish leaders' political fears of losing their "place and nation" over His influence (John 11:48). Christ never intended to be an earthly king over a worldly kingdom (John 18:36), nor was He a politician seeking election per

popularity among voters: nevertheless, His ministry and His message frequently intersected and influenced the political landscape of the first century.

It still does today. He never discussed “Brexit,” “WMD’s,” or “Benghazi.” He spent no breath debating education budgets, highway systems, proprietary internet restrictions, or government healthcare: all relevant expediencies subject to human judgment in government’s God-given role of protection, punishment, and peace. Jesus impacted deeper issues: matters of integrity and righteousness wherein the governors and the governed were to submit to God’s law rather supplant it with human legislation (Acts 5:29).

In identifying Jesus’ political platform, consider what might be deemed His acceptance speech, spoken to His apostles after conquering death but before ascending to His throne:

All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (Mat. 28:18-20)

Who is on the Lord’s side?

The Political Platform of Jesus Is the New Testament

Jesus’ apostles were to teach all nations “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mat. 28:19-20), thus Jesus’ platform is found in what Jesus

commanded His apostles during His ministry, what the apostles' taught as Jesus' authorized representatives, and what New Testament Christians observed in obedience to those teachings. In short, His platform is evident in His campaign, His cabinet, and His citizenry.

Jesus Platform Is Seen Through His Campaign.

The words "all things whatsoever I have commanded you" refer to Jesus' ministry, a town-to-town campaign sharing the good news of His kingdom (Mark 1:14; Mark 1:38). It was a grassroots campaign, sending souls He had already taught into towns He planned to visit so as to have the residents engaged and interested when He arrived (Luke 10:1). He campaigned on a message of change, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:17). He sought to change each man to be what God wants, not change the world to be what man wants. He campaigned for change from the individual heart outward, not from government downward. He campaigned on unwavering integrity, refusing to take Satan's shortcut to power (Mat. 4:8-10).

His signature campaign speech, The Sermon on the Mount, began by emphasizing the lowly attitudes (Mat. 5:1-12), luminous influence (Mat. 5:13-16), and lofty morality that were to characterize His kingdom's citizens (Mat. 5:20). He aimed for the heart, stressing the impact of the heart and mind in such practical areas as feuds, fornication, falsehoods, treatment of foes, religious faith, and personal finance (Mat. 5:21-6:34), and it serves as a solid foundation for the platform Jesus presented throughout the entirety of His ministry.

Between His speeches, His debates, and His personal interactions in public and private, the Gospel accounts supply integral details of Jesus' platform not found elsewhere in Scripture. However, Jesus' platform includes more than the Gospel accounts.

Jesus' Platform Is Seen Through His Cabinet.

Having all power "in heaven and in earth," Christ delegated authority (Mat. 28:18-20).

In preparing for inauguration, the President-elect nominates trusted individuals to serve as his Cabinet. These key administrative roles are intended to be likeminded leaders in their departments delegated to act "by authority or direction of the President," who operate with presumed executive approval and therefore do not "require express authorization" ("3 U.S. Code § 302"). In other words, Cabinet members do not need a detailed permission slip from the President to perform their duties: they bear his authority.

The apostles were Jesus' cabinet. Their message was more than a verbatim repetition of Jesus' statements while on earth, and their teaching went beyond a mere rehashing of the truths recorded in the Gospel accounts.

During His ministry, Jesus entrusted the twelve with miraculous authority over demons, diseases, and disabilities (Mat. 10:10). As Calvary neared, He readied them for greater authority: whatever they would "loose on earth" would be what had been "loosed in heaven" (Mat. 18:18; cf. Mat. 16:19), and they would "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mat. 19:28). The night before His death, He promised to send the Holy Ghost

as their Comforter to bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26), testify of Jesus (John 15:26), guide them into all truth (John 16:13), and show them things to come (John 16:13). On the day He was resurrected, Christ exhorted His apostles to receive the Holy Ghost and then described their authoritative role as Spirit-inspired teachers entrusted to administer heaven's standards with heaven's stamp of approval: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:22-23). On the day of Pentecost, after the apostles "were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:1-4), those who obeyed the Gospel "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

The Gospel accounts supply sufficient evidence to convince souls that Jesus is Christ (John 20:30-31), but they do not record His every word or deed: if they did, earth lacks the real estate for the resulting library (John 21:25). Moreover, the apostles still had much more to learn the night of Jesus' arrest: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12), another reason they would need the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Not everything Jesus said is recorded, and Jesus said He had more to say.

This is why Paul could adamantly announce, "the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). The apostles were "ambassadors for Christ" who spoke "in Christ's stead" (2 Cor. 5:20). Paul once quoted words of Jesus recorded nowhere else in Scripture, exhorting elders to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). There is more to learn about Jesus and

His platform than what is recorded in the Gospel accounts.

The apostles' doctrine is Jesus' doctrine. The apostles' platform is Jesus' platform. To disregard and ignore the apostles is to disregard and ignore Jesus.

Efforts abound to strip authority from the apostles' inspired words: all fail. Attempts to prioritize what is "written in red," endeavors to elevate the authority of the Sermon on the Mount as "more central than an obscure passage in Romans," are but futile exercises to marginalize the apostles' doctrine by people who stand opposed to the platform of Christ.

The apostles of Christ received authority from Christ to speak for Christ in leading souls to Christ. Anyone who calls any New Testament passage "obscure" has not read his New Testament enough. The apostles' inspired words, along with the other inspired New Testament penmen on whom the apostles laid their hands and bestowed the Spirit's gift, were straight from the mouth of God (2 Tim. 3:16).

Jesus' Platform Is Seen Through His Citizens.

The apostles were to teach believers to "observe all things" Jesus had commanded (Mat. 28:20). Those who gladly received their words were baptized and "added to the church" (Acts 2:41; Acts 2:47). To be added to the church is to be "translated... into the kingdom" (Col. 1:13). Christ's kingdom is His church and Christians are the kingdom's citizens: "For our citizenship is in heaven" (Phi. 3:20, ASV).

Christians in the New Testament shed additional light on Jesus' platform through their examples. For instance, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-10), and the apostles taught saints to observe it regularly and with proper

focus (1 Cor. 11:26), yet knowing “how often” requires the example of Christ’s citizens, for it was “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). The approved behavior of Christ’s citizens shows the practical application of the principles taught by Christ and His apostles, not only in matters of worship, but also in conduct and Christian living.

Christians in the New Testament shed additional light on Jesus’ platform through their expectations. In this life Jesus’ people are “strangers and pilgrims” expected to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). His kingdom has no room for perpetuated sin or support of it. Paul declared that “the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” leaving no place for “fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, [n]or thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Pursuers of the works of the flesh “shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” thus excluding “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, [i]dolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like” (Gal. 5:19-21). The “children of disobedience” have not “any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God,” granting admittance for “no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater” (Eph. 5:5). If Jesus’ kingdom in the first century offered no place for deeds of unrighteousness, works of the flesh, and behaviors of disobedience, could there be any justification for Christians to offer political support to such behaviors today?

Jesus’ kingdom “is not of this world” (John 19:39),

and His kingdom's citizens do not act like the world around them. When Paul declared that saints' "citizenship is in heaven" (Phi. 3:20), he used the word *politeuma*, indicating "a community," and derived from a word describing how a person elects to "behave as a citizen," *politeuomai* (Strong): Christians are to act like citizens of a higher community: a heavenly kingdom.

Christ's enemies focus on the physical, celebrate the shameful, and answer to their appetites, not heavenly citizens who are on the Lord's side:

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things (Phi. 3:18-19).

The Christian's politics are that of a heavenly citizen.

Jesus' citizens are humble (Mat. 18:3-4), not motivated by self-exaltation and self-interests. Jesus' citizens are changed (Mat. 4:17), heartbroken with a Godly sorrow that changed their way of thinking and their way of living (2 Cor. 7:10; Acts 26:20). Jesus' citizens have a higher authority (Mat. 7:21), submitting to the will of the Father rather than personal preference. Jesus' citizens have a higher standard (Mat. 5:20), with a righteousness beyond the superficial religion of political posers. Jesus' citizens have higher priorities (Mat. 6:33), seeking God's kingdom and God's standard over worldly comforts and considerations. This was true in the first century. It remains true today.

Jesus' platform is still available, preserved in the New Testament record of the events of His campaign, the efforts of His cabinet, and the example of His citizens. The next

question: “Should His two-millennia old platform influence how Christians approach politics today?”

Jesus promised to be with His disciples always (Mat. 28:20), alluding not only to His aid while miracles were needed (Mark 16:20; 1 Cor. 13:8), but also His presence with any who heed His Word: “If a man love Me, he will keep My Words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). Throughout the ages and on all occasions, let saints remember His promise, “lo, I am with you always:” even at the polls.

His promise is timeless. So are His precepts: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Words shall not pass away” (Mat. 24:35). Peter trusted that “the Word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:25). Jesus, seated at Majesty’s right hand, still stands on the standards He shared two millennia ago. Even in today’s pressing political issues, His platform is unchanged.

What are today’s “pressing political issues,” and where does Jesus stand?

Today’s pressing issues are seen in voters’ priorities. A 2012 study identified twelve issues deemed important to at least twenty-nine percent of voters (“Election 2012 Priorities...”):

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Health Care (74%) | Terrorism (50%) |
| Immigration (41%) | Taxes (62%) |
| Education (48%) | Gay marriage (31%) |
| Jobs/Employment (54%) | |
| Middle East War (46%) | Environment (30%) |
| Foreign Oil (52%) | |
| Domestic Violence (42%) | Abortion (29%) |

Four of these issues can be categorized as economics (healthcare, taxes, jobs, foreign oil), two pertain to military defense (terrorism, Middle East War), and the rest are best categorized individually: education, domestic violence, immigration, gay marriage, environment, and abortion. Several of these topics could be classified as “moral issues,” but applying that label here would be premature. Determining which issues are “moral issues” requires a standard. Political persuaders are experts at turning benign topics into “moral issues” to garner support: they amplify and exaggerate the moral weight of one issue so as to overshadow and ignore the weighty moral repercussions of another, redefining morality based on rights and freedoms rather than rights and wrongs. Therefore, before assigning the “morality” label to any topic, Christ’s people must let Jesus’ words dictate which issues qualify as “moral issues.”

Sadly, of the twelve issues voters deemed most important in 2012, the top four pertained to economics. Has money trumped morality in America? What about among Christians?

Today’s pressing issues are seen in party platforms. America’s most familiar platforms are crafted every four years by national political parties and presented at their conventions. In the United States’ current two-party system, the most recent Democrat and Republican platforms of 2016 reveal the most “pressing political issues.”

At a combined total of ninety-nine pages, a word-for-word examination of both party platforms is not feasible, nor is an attempt to identify key issues based simply on the major headings of the platforms: these documents are not itemized lists designed to give voters a clear look at their

options like window invoices at automotive dealerships. They are written speeches sculpted to sway voters through lofty-sounding ideals, with one platform appealing to past national glory and future national hope by using words like restore, rebirth, reform, and resurgent (“Republican Platform 2016”), and with the other appealing more to a national sense of disadvantage and victimhood with terms and phrases like “economic security for the middle class,” fairness, inequality, and barriers (“2016 Democratic...”). Identifying key issues from these documents requires combing them for recurring themes and emphasized ideas, aided by recalling the aforementioned key issues of 2012, and further aided by an awareness of behaviors that disqualify souls from citizenship in heaven’s kingdom.

The pressing issues of the 2016 Democratic Party Platform and the Republican Platform 2016 include economics (wages, healthcare, insurance, taxes, jobs), national defense, abortion, gay marriage, inequality, environment, criminal justice (death penalty), and gun control.

Which of these matters matter to Jesus? Where does He stand? Where must saints stand?

Jesus’ Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Economics.

Jesus’ most familiar campaign speech introduced His economic policy:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat. 6:19-21).

He told those considering citizenship in His kingdom: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). When it came to economics, Jesus put the emphasis on righteousness. His platform does not compromise plain-and-simple righteousness for the sake of economic gain. God has never destroyed a nation over a weak economy: He has over weak morality (Pro. 14:34).

Jesus’ economic platform was not popular with the greedy rich. When a rich young ruler walked away sorrowful because following Jesus required forsaking the only thing he loved more than God (Mark 10:21-22), Christ stressed to His disciples, “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24).

Jesus’ economic platform was not popular with the greedy poor. When a man said to Jesus, “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” (Luke 12:13), apparently petitioning that his older brother share the double portion entitled to the firstborn (Deu. 21:17), Jesus refused to arbitrate: “Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?” (Luke 12:14). Instead He warned the petitioner, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

Imagine that. The Occupy-the-Inheritance movement sought Jesus’ endorsement, and He charged them with covetousness!

Let saints heed Jesus’ warning, for countless Christians

share the covetous brother's philosophy and imbed his mentality into their children. For example, a child (usually younger) sees a sibling (usually older) playing with a toy, and the "have not" child pulls the galactic I-want-what-you-have trump card: "God wants us to share!!" If that fails, the "underprivileged" child tattles to the nearest sympathetic adult (parent, grandparent, babysitter), crying, "He won't share," knowing the power of those magic words. When a covetous little brother came to Jesus pleading, "Tell my brother to share," Jesus did not make the older brother surrender his goodies: He told the tattler to stop being so greedy! How many parents are instilling the Occupy Wall Street mindset by forcing one child to forfeit an item because another child covets it? Why not ask questions: "Whose toy is it? Who had it first?" Junior likely needs to hear, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." If he wants what someone else has, he can learn delayed gratification and wait until the other person finishes. Just because he wants it does not mean he has to have it.

How many saints would be voting differently if they heeded Jesus' economic platform?

Ever the balanced teacher, Jesus next dealt with selfish greed among those who "have," telling of the self-serving rich man who built bigger barns for his self interests and was then unprepared when his soul was required (Luke 12:16-20). Jesus concluded, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). Jesus' economic platform left no room for selfish motivations among the rich or the poor, the "have's" or the "have not's."

The combined examples of Jesus' cabinet and His citizens shed further light on His financial policies. Early

Christians were characterized by their generous sharing of possessions (Acts 2:44-45). None claimed that “ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common” (Acts 4:33): in other words, each approached his own property with a what’s-mine-is-yours mentality. They viewed their own property this way, but how did they view others’ possessions? Peter said of the liar Ananias’ land and money, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4): they viewed the possessions of others with a what’s-yours-is-yours mentality. The early church was neither socialistic nor communal: ownership belonged to individuals, not the community at large, donations were made voluntarily, and distribution was made to an individual “according as he had need” (Acts 4:35), not according to desires. They were generous. They were selfless.

Contrast this with today’s modern economic sentiments: the possessive greed of what’s-mine-is-mine combined with the jealous greed of what’s-yours-is-mine, polar opposite to the generous selflessness of what’s-mine-is-yours combined with the contented selflessness of what’s-your-is-yours.

Christ’s economic platform has no place for encouraging the able-bodied to sit idly while the community or the government supplies their necessities, for only the lowest of infidels would “provide not for his own, specially for those of his own house” (1 Tim. 5:8). Christ’s economics supply need, not greed. For the person who is physically capable of labor but who puts his family in need by foregoing jobs that he feels are beneath him (perhaps holding out for a management position), Paul’s words still apply: “if a man will not work, neither should he eat” (2

The. 3:10).

Should Christians be focused on getting a bigger slice of pie from the “one percent”? Should the elect be electing officials based on who will pad their pockets, whether rich or poor? “Take heed, and beware of covetousness” (Luke 12:15).

Who is on the Lord's side?

Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Abortion.

Jesus' campaign audience already knew murder was wrong, having been taught, “Thou shalt not kill” and that a murderer was “in danger of the judgment” (Mat. 5:21). He campaigned against the very mindsets that result in the deliberate taking of innocent human life:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Mat. 5:22).

He did not condemn all anger and negative assessments, for even Jesus had anger (Mark 3:5; cf. Eph. 4:26), and even He identified fools when needed (Mat. 23:17). The danger was having no valid reason for being angry, vilifying and devaluing others as worthless (Strong, “Rhaca”), and dismissing others as fools: a person with such warrantless disregard for others will have no regard for their lives.

Apply this to abortion. Why would a mother seek to extinguish the life of her unborn child? Is she angry at her child's existence: the baby is not to blame. Is her child worthless to her, not worth the effort of pregnancy, childbirth, or rearing: the baby has done nothing to deserve vilification. Is her child mindless to her, possibly

even perceived as not quite human: the baby, with its own DNA and individual blood type, is a separate person with untold positive potential, even in the cases of birth defects. Jesus warned against the very mentalities that led to at least ninety-six percent of abortions in 2004 (“Reasons U.S. Women...”): the same mentalities resulted in over 99.99% of Florida’s 70,083 abortions in 2018 (“U.S. Abortion Statistics”).

Later in His signature campaign speech, Jesus recalled the precept, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” (Mat. 5:38), which the Jews misapplied to personal matters of insult and inconvenience rather than criminal matters of life and death (Mat. 5:39-42). Interestingly, Scripture first used the “eye for an eye” terminology concerning pregnancy: if men fighting inadvertently battered a pregnant woman and induced early labor with no harm to the mother or child, the guilty was to be punished with a fine, but if either the mother or the child were harmed, the guilty was to give “life for life, [e]ye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Exo. 21:22-24). God declared the unborn baby to be “life,” and God demanded “life for life” for harm done **accidentally**. What about the **deliberate** harm done to unborn babies today?

Jesus’ infant life was targeted and untold numbers of babies were slain (Mat. 2:16): would He condone this nation’s wholesale slaughter of over sixty million unborn children since 1973? Jesus said, “Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom God” (Mat. 19:14): would He approve of His people endorsing politicians who proudly push for a woman’s right to choose over a baby’s right to live? The

same Old Testament that foretold Jesus' birth also depicts life as beginning at conception (Jer. 1:5; Psa. 139:14-15): would He recant these principles and discount unborn babies as expendable tissue for the sake of tax breaks and entitlements? Children are a gift from God (Psa. 127:3): would Jesus vote in favor of refusing that gift, dissecting it piece by piece before its eyes can behold the light of day? Man is made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27; Mat. 22:20-21): would Jesus elect to make destroying that image an acceptable, affordable, and accessible right?

His cabinet continued His condemnation of murder (Gal. 5:21). The apostle Paul denounced the desertion of "natural affection" (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3), an apt description of over ninety-nine percent of abortions today wherein a mother disregards her unborn child's life because she is not ready or mature enough for a child, cannot afford a baby, is finished having children, does not want to be a single mother, is too busy with her education or career, does not want a baby with a birth defect, or is unwilling to risk a non-life threatening impact on her physical health ("U.S. Abortion Statistics").

Christ's cabinet frequently used Old Testament facts to convey Christ's platform (Rom. 15:4). Fact: God was patient with His chosen nation of Israel, but when He ultimately sent them into captivity, their indictment repeatedly included the charge of slaughtering children and shedding innocent blood (2 Kin. 17:17-18; 2 Kin. 21:6; 2 Kin. 21:16; 2 Kin. 24:3-4). If God sent Israel and Judah into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity over innocent blood, what can a nation anticipate when **Christians** in the land cast their lots in support of killing blameless babies?

*Who is on the Lord's side?**Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Gay Marriage.*

Jesus' campaign stressed a familiarity with the Old Testament: He came to fulfill the law and emphasized the importance of the "least commandments" in His kingdom (Mat. 5:17-19). His death fulfilled the Law of Moses and instituted the Law of Christ (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14; Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 3:24-25; Gal. 6:2), changing man's concept of God's kingdom, the organization of the kingdom, and the pattern of worship. While moral principles were unchanged. Moses called murder and adultery sin (Exo. 20:13-14); so did Jesus (Mat. 5:21; Mat. 5:27; Mat. 19:18), and so did His apostles (Gal. 5:19-21). The same is true of same-sex intimacy.

Homosexual relationships were sinful before Jesus' campaign, violating God's fundamental requirements for sexual fulfillment: a married man and woman (Gen. 2:24). It was condemned as an act of passion: it was an abomination for men to lie together in the way that only a man and woman should lie together (Lev. 20:13), behavior as damnable as bestiality (Lev. 20:15-16). It was condemned as an act of prostitution: "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel" (Deu. 23:17). It was condemned as an act of pride: God said haughtiness drove Sodom's abomination when their men proudly marched to Lot's door and demanded to impose their rapist desires upon Lot's guests in the first recorded gay pride parade (Eze. 16:49-50; Gen. 19:4-7).

No wonder Paul thus described the LGBT movements of antiquity:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men working with men that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (Rom. 1:26-27)

Homosexual behavior is sinful in Jesus' kingdom: His citizens cannot be "effeminate" or "abusers of themselves with mankind" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). The word "effeminate" translates *malakos*, literally meaning soft, and used of a catamite, "a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness" (Thayer). The phrase "abusers of themselves with mankind" translates *arsenokoites*, a word combining "man" (*arsen*) with "bed" (*koite*) (Thayer): *koite* strongly denotes marital intimacy (Heb. 13:4), conception (Rom. 9:10), and the male sperm (Strong). The image is graphic: deeds involving the marriage bed, conception, and human seed are honorable and undefiled between husband and wife, but they are an abomination between man and man.

What about men married to men or women married to women: would their intimate deeds not be acceptable in the marriage bed? On this Jesus speaks clearly and concisely: "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife" (Mark 10:6-7). From the beginning marriage has been the union of a man and a woman. Jesus upheld this order.

Marriage is for a man and a woman: thus a man cannot marry a man. Sex is for the confines of marriage: thus sex outside of marriage is sin. Since sex outside of marriage is

sin, and since marriage requires a man and a woman, any sexual interaction involving men with men or women with women violates God's design for marriage and intimacy and is therefore sin.

Jesus and His cabinet condemned homosexuality in a society wherein it was widely practiced, particularly among the most influential: emperors and affluent citizens. If ever an era existed wherein mankind was primed to view same-sex relationships as acceptable, if ever a time offered God the chance to clarify sexual preference as optional, it was the first century. Yet, not one Scriptural reference even subtly condones a man with a husband or a woman with a wife. No apostle exhorted husbands to submit to their own husbands or bade a wife to be the head of her wife (Eph. 5:23-26). Such plugs for acceptance are frequent today, when modern movies and music seek to normalize such lifestyles with shrewd references slipped into scripts and lyrics: such as a woman discussing a recent date and referring to her date as "she," or a man describing the engagement ring he found for his fiancé but is not sure if "he" will like it.

Jesus' platform offers neither allowance nor support for gay marriage or homosexual relationships. Paul not only condemned the sin, but those who "have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). How many Christians today have pleasure in homosexuality and homosexual marriage, not by directly engaging in such relationships, but by casting their vote in favor of those who advocate for acceptance of what God calls an abomination?

Eventually homosexuality's defenders turn to hermaphroditism ("intersex," in PC terms). The claim: "If babies can have both male and female sex organs, then

there are degrees of maleness and femaleness, which explains homosexuality.” The problem: real hermaphroditism constitutes as low as .018% of the population (Sax 1), and as high as .07% (“Answers to...”), and results from a mutated chromosome (“Hermaphroditism”). Attempts abound to identify other Disorders of Sexual Development with the intersex condition (Sax 2), but these are no different than healthy students who first see a diabetic classmate get an extra snack during class and then claim wooziness so that the appetites of several can benefit from the medical condition of the one. A mutated gene in .07% of the population does not justify the mutated lusts of 4.5%. If mutated sex genes justify all same-sex attraction, what about disorders that limit mental maturity, like Down syndrome (“Down Syndrome”)? If hermaphroditism excuses homosexuality, then a rare chromosome disorder that limits one person’s mental maturity to age ten excuses a broader class of people who claim that their sexual attractions never advanced beyond age ten: thus their pedophilia is excusable! This is the direction of the world’s thinking, but not Christ’s!

Like the shedding of innocent blood, systemic sexual deviancy is a final straw in God’s longsuffering with a nation’s iniquities (Lev. 18:21-25). God casts out nations for such conduct.

Who is on the Lord’s side?

Jesus’ Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on National Defense.

According to Jesus’ cabinet, God mandated government to protect the good and punish the wicked (Rom. 13:3-4): this applies on both the local level and the national level.

The military's primary role is national protection.

A nation needs a military. Jesus established a spiritual nation (Mat. 16:18-19; 1 Pet. 2:9), and its citizens are a spiritual military (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17). What about physical nations? Can Christ's spiritual citizens serve in a physical nation's physical military?

How often did Jesus and His representatives instruct soldiers to abandon military duty? When soldiers asked John the baptizer what they needed to do to repent, John instructed, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14): these local security enforcers for the publicans were not told to retire as fruit of repentance. When a centurion asked Jesus' aid for his sickly servant, even using his military rank to illustrate that Jesus had the authority to heal by simply saying the words, Jesus commended the soldier's faith and granted his request (Mat. 8:5-13): He gave no hint of saying "go thy way and soldier no more." When Peter preached Christ to the household of the centurion Cornelius, nary a word condemned Cornelius' military career (Acts 10:34-48).

Question: if God authorized government (and He did – Rom. 13:3), and if government's responsibility includes the use of force to protect the good and punish the wicked (and it does – Rom. 13:3-4), and if government representatives are ministers of God "for good" (and they are – Rom. 13:4), then can God's citizens (Christians) serve as God's ministers for good by being involved in government, law enforcement, or the military? If not, why not? Should only the lost be God's ministers for good in government? Is that sensible?

No, government service does not justify sin, whether

it is a polluted politician, corrupt cop, or a sinful soldier. Nevertheless, the potential violence involved in military service is not necessarily sinful, otherwise Paul could have never spoken of a “minister of God... for good” who “beareth not the sword in vain” (Rom. 13:4).

The Christian’s challenge concerning national defense regards the real motives for military action. What was the purpose of the war in Iraq: oil or the threat of weapons of mass destruction? The same sort of questions could be endlessly debated for almost any foreign war in which the U.S. has been involved: was military action necessary, or were human suffering and terrorist threats merely exaggerated to camouflage political and financial motivations? Without the capacity to see the future or the clearance to see what is classified, how should Christians approach the topic of national defense?

Christians can sort the options with two simple questions. First, how safe is the family that entrusts its home security to a self-professed and remorseless child killer with ungodly sexual appetites? Second, and on the same token, who is most likely to make Godly decisions concerning a nation’s security: those who support the murder of unborn children and the normalization of homosexuality, or those who hold to Jesus’ platform on the sanctity of human life and the sanctity of the home? Only a fool would trust proud pushers of wicked policies to exercise wisdom in national security. “It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness” (Pro. 16:12). “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn” (Pro. 29:2). Never expect the most wicked to make

the wisest and most righteous decisions for a nation.

Who is on the Lord's side?

Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Environment.

Jesus cares for the environment, but He places man above birds and grass (Mat. 6:25-30).

Jesus cares for the environment: He made it, and He sustains it (Col. 1:16-17). Man has been given dominion over the works of God's hands (Heb. 2:7-8; Psa. 8:4-8), which makes man a steward of God's property, and since stewards are required to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2), Jesus expects man to practice responsible stewardship of the creation.

Responsible stewardship is not mindless disregard for the environment, such as deliberately careless disposal of cancer-causing waste, willfully tainting water supplies and food sources with HAZMAT waste, and recklessly littering landscapes because convenience is prioritized over endangering wildlife and defacing property, whether done by individuals, companies, or nations. God expected His people to be responsible pertaining to natural human waste (Deu. 23:12-13): does He expect any less of modern man's manufactured waste?

Responsible stewardship is not alarmist hyper-regard for the environment. Fanatics warn that every squirt of an aerosol can threatens the ozone layer, every turn of a car key damages the atmosphere, and every expulsion from a cow's stomach contributes to global warming (Lean). Does Jesus agree with former Vice President Al Gore's assessment that "the climate crisis is the greatest threat we face as a nation" (Gajanan)? Does Christ concur with Senator Ocasio-Cortez's "climate change" conclusion: "I think

what we have laid out here is a very clear moral problem in terms of leadership, if we fail to act or even if we delay in acting, we will have blood on our hands” (Irvine)? Does the Lord stand with atheist Carl Sagan: “There is no cause more urgent, no dedication more fitting than to protect the future of our species... No social convention, no political system, no economic hypothesis, no religious dogma is more important” (Sagan, 89)?

Jesus offers a higher and more balanced perspective of man’s stewardship over the earth.

First, concerning stewardship of living creatures, Jesus was a proponent of eating tasty animals: He cooked fish (John 21:9), served fish (John 21:13), and ate fish (Luke 24:42-43). His teeth chewed mutton (Luke 22:15-16; cf. Exo. 12:3-8; Exo. 12:14). He used livestock for practical purposes (Mat. 21:1-7). His deeds reflect God’s desires for man’s stewardship. God permits man to domesticate animals as pets or beasts of burden (Gen. 9:2), but animal cruelty is wickedness (Pro. 12:10). God permits man to use animals as food (Gen. 9:3), but to hunt meat and leave it to rot is laziness (Pro. 12:27). God even taught the importance of preserving mature animals, a conservation practice that avoids a disruption in breeding (Deu. 23:6-7).

Second, regarding environmental stewardship, Jesus has the stability of earth’s ecosystems well under control, for even now He is “upholding all things by the Word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). The same authority that sent a global flood is preventing global catastrophe:

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Pet. 3:7)

Following the flood, the Father made a promise: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22). Climate dramatists warn that global warming is melting the polar ice caps, will raise ocean levels and inundate coastal regions, and will change weather patterns as cold polar waters push toward the equator and lower ocean temperatures, eventually threatening life on earth. The climate Designer promised that seasons and fluctuations and cold and heat would continue until the final day wherein everything “shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). God will determine when this old sinful physical world is ready to be folded and discarded (Heb. 1:10-12): until then, He has promised that earth and its seasonal cycles will stand and await His appointed day. Only human arrogance would credit mankind with the ability to undermine God’s established order in sustaining life on earth.

Jesus’ platform demands responsible environmental stewardship. An earlier question ought to be restated here: who is most likely to make Godly decisions concerning the environment: those who recklessly discard innocent babies as biological waste and endorse the sexual deviancies that truly pollute the land (Lev. 18:21-25), or those who hold to Jesus’ platform on the sanctity of human life and the sanctity of the home? Only a fool would trust proud

pushers of wicked policies to exercise wisdom concerning environmental stewardship.

Who is on the Lord's side?

Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Criminal Justice.

Jesus endorsed criminal justice, warning His people to reconcile disagreements and debts lest they lead to imprisonment (Mat. 5:25-26). Rather than oppose incarceration as an oppressive system, Jesus endorsed it as a means of just retribution for crimes and debts, even using potential life sentences and infliction of pain by “tormenters” to illustrate God’s justice (Mat. 18:33-35).

Christ’s cabinet endorsed criminal justice. Peter stressed submission to officials tasked with “the punishment of evildoers” (1 Pet. 2:14). Paul agreed: “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). Obviously not all government authorities are “good.” Paul penned these words during the reign of the wicked Nero who would later brutally murder Christians, yet Paul recognized and emphasized government’s prerogative to maintain order and safety by executing punishment upon lawbreakers. If God inspired Paul to make such a statement with Nero on the throne, let saints today be wary of systemic unruly attitudes toward modern law enforcement.

Jesus spoke of penalties involving prison and pain. Paul spoke of punishment involving execution, even his own: “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing

worthy of death, I refuse not to die” (Acts 25:11). Paul did not oppose the death penalty when it was deserved.

When is death deserved? Jesus’ platform acknowledges the propriety of the death penalty, but He gave no list of capital crimes. Paul gave a laundry list of the heathen sins and said “that they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32), but Paul described “the wages of sin” (Rom. 6:23), not the immediate societal penalty for every sin.

With no New Testament list of capital offenses, consider the Old Testament. Capital crimes included murder, an attack upon the very image of God (Gen. 9:6; Exo. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:31); manslaughter, including accidental death and negligent homicide, if the offender left his city of refuge (Exo. 21:13; Num. 35:22-27); attempted murder (Exo. 12:14); kidnapping and human trafficking (Exo. 21:16); physical and verbal abuse (Exo. 21:15-17); sexual crimes such as adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and rape (Lev. 20:10-16; Deu. 22:25); and luring others away from God to serve idols (Deu. 13:5-10).

Should government today execute people for adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, or consensual incest: not necessarily, for even Christ gave the guilty adulteress space to repent of her sexual capital offense (John 8:11). Should government today execute people for deterring souls from following Jesus: not necessarily, for such a situation would have necessitated Paul’s death before he “obtained mercy” and became an apostle (1 Tim. 1:12-13). Not every Old Testament capital offense has to be enjoined upon society today, but Jesus’ platform clearly supports a government’s

responsibility to use criminal justice and punishment in maintaining law and order. In the words of the wise man: “A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them” (Pro. 20:26; cf. Pro. 20:8).

While time lasts and crime exists, cries of “cruel and unusual” will protest penalties. Cain tried it when facing exile for murder: “My punishment is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13). God granted protection to the exiled killer (Gen. 4:15), and Cain’s line fell into homicidal arrogance (Gen. 4:23-24). Eventually the earth was “filled with violence” after Seth’s Godly lineage intermarried Cain’s carnal family (Gen. 6:2; Gen. 6:11). After the flood, having shown where unrequited murder leads, God instated the death penalty: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man” (Gen. 9:6).

Dying on a cross, the penitent thief admitted that he deserved his agony (Luke 23:41). He then besought Jesus, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom:” and received the unforgettable answer, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). Question: suppose that malefactor had protested, “I am guilty, but I do not deserve such a cruel and unusual penalty,” would Jesus still have promised him paradise?

Jesus’ platform recognizes the need for both penalty and pity.

Like innocent blood and sexual deviancy (Lev. 18:21-25), unpunished violence is a third area of iniquity that defiles a nation (Num. 35:33), and is a telltale sign of a failing society.

*Who is on the Lord's side?**Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Inequality.*

Jesus campaigned among Jews, but His message extended to “all the world” (Mark 16:15). He broke cultural norms as a Jewish man teaching a Samaritan woman (John 4:9-10). In Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female,” for all are “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). The Gospel does not discriminate on the basis of culture or color (Rom. 10:12), and neither do those souls saved by it (Rom. 1:15-16).

In Christ people of various economic, educational, and ethnic backgrounds are not only joined into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), but they can share the same mind! Christ's citizens are “not conformed to this world,” they are transformed with renewed minds (Rom. 12:2). They are able to “speak the same thing” with “no divisions” among them, “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Rather than let their worldviews be defined by their skin color, financial status, or scholastic ability, they are humble enough to “be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phi. 2:2). They heed Paul's exhortation, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 2:5). They “walk by the same rule” and “mind the same thing” (Phi. 3:16). Likeminded saints can look at current issues the same way, measuring matters by the Bible's standard instead of cultural prejudice. Jesus' citizens define themselves and their decisions based upon righteousness alone (John 7:24). The world's population, police, and politicians may practice prejudice, but Christ's citizens neither harbor bias nor assume partiality on the part

of their brethren.

Sadly, too many brethren harbor worldly bias. Disagree? How many saw this title and then checked the author's complexion before deciding whether to read the manuscript? How many Christians see the headline "white officer shoots black suspect" from a city 1000 miles away and automatically think they know exactly what happened and who did wrong?

Racism uses race as the key metric to decide who gets accepted, educated, or employed. Sexism uses gender as the key metric to decide who gets positions, pay, and perks. [Gender roles in the church are no more inequitable than elders' qualifications: all reflect God's design and prerogative, not unequal value (1 Tim. 2:8-3:8).] Inequality is ugly. Christianity is beautiful.

What is a saint's highest voting priority: finding which candidate best represents Christ's principles, or the candidate that best represents the Christian's pigment? Only a hypocrite can ignore Christ's moral standards, base his choice on such superficial and prejudicial criteria as his race or his tax bracket, and then with a straight face claim that he seeks equality.

The cry of "inequality" is no excuse for iniquity. Gay marriage is not an equality issue: a homosexual man has the same rights to marry a woman as a heterosexual man, but he wants to expand rights and definitions to suit his lusts. If homosexuality is an equality issue, what about incest: is it prejudice to prohibit a man from marrying his sister? What about bestiality: is it bias to ban a man from enjoying his donkey? What about pedophilia: is it inequality to incriminate an adult for acting on his attraction to

someone's preteen daughter?

The cry of "inequality" is no excuse for illegality. A group's disdain for a law does not make the law prejudicial against that particular group. Speed limits are for all drivers and thus are not systemic discrimination against speed junkies. Drug laws are for all citizens and thus are not systemic discrimination against narcotics abusers. Immigration laws are for all immigrants and thus are not systemic discrimination against those who seek to enter illegally.

Christ's platform rejects inequality just as much as it rejects iniquity and illegality.

Who is on the Lord's side?

Jesus' Platform Teaches Saints Where to Stand on Gun Control.

Jesus discerned between assault and insult:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also (Mat. 5:39).

A smite on the cheek was a slap in the face: an insult, not an assault. Christ forbade retribution and reciprocation of insults.

Jesus never mentioned AR-15's, extended clips, or bump stocks, but He did direct His apostles to arm themselves with the day's most common personal defense weapon: "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:36). Why did apostles need swords?

The swords were not for evangelism-by-force, for

Christianity is not spread through carnal warfare (2 Cor. 10:4). The swords were not for organizing political uprisings, otherwise His people would have fought to free Him (John 19:36); instead, He rebuked Peter for abusing his open carry status by improperly using a sword to oppose a small army and try to prevent Jesus' arrest, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mat. 26:52; John 18:3; John 18:10). The swords were not even for opening epistles the apostles mailed each other. The sword had one use: self-defense.

Christians are not brawlers eagerly seeking occasion to use deadly force. The apostles stressed peace over violence: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). What if peace is not possible? Must the saved submit peacefully to every violent attack on their persons and families? If saints cannot defend themselves or their families with force, then a Christian husband's vow to "guide, guard, and protect" goes only as far as, "Excuse me, sir, please don't touch my wife," whatever the nature of the assault: if the assailant persists, all the husband can say is, "Honey, turn the other cheek." Is that a Christian husband?

God has always expected His people to defend the helpless and prevent assault. A betrothed damsel found with another man in city limits was to be stoned as an adulteress because she did not cry for help and was therefore complicit, but a woman who was forced in the field was presumed to have cried for help but none was available (Deu. 22:13-27): thus God expected His people to answer cries for help and intervene to ward off assaults on the defenseless.

Thus Jesus said to get swords: He did not limit the apostles to sticks in a sword fight. Would He opt for laws today that put His people at a defensive disadvantage against the lawless?

Saints obey the law of the land (Rom. 13:4), even if that law puts them at a disadvantage. Fortunately, while Christians are authorized to practice self-defense, their greatest defense is from above. The Philistines enforced sword control laws on Israel (1 Sam. 13:19-22), but God strengthened His people despite their weapons disadvantage (1 Sam. 14:12-14). He still can.

The real problem is not the presence of weapons: it is the absence of morals. With ever-increasing technology and ever-increasing access to precision machinery, access to increasingly efficient firearms is inevitable. In such an environment, as long as human life is devalued to being on par with any other animal, human life will continue to be treated like it is worthless. Restrictions, however well intended, are not the ultimate answer: righteousness is.

Who is on the Lord's side?

The Political Platform of Jesus Is the Saint's Discernment

Jesus' campaign emphasized living life choice by choice. Consider how He concluded His signature campaign speech. There are two paths: choose the strait and narrow (Mat. 7:13-14). There are two trees: choose the one with good fruit (Mat. 7:15-20). There are two kinds of followers: choose to be the one who does the Father's will (Mat. 7:21-23). There are two kinds of hearers: choose to be the wise one that hears His sayings and does them (Mat. 7:24-27).

Man has a knack for complicating issues. Jesus has a knack for simplifying complicated choices. With His enemies preparing to pounce if He healed a man on the Sabbath, He asked, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?” (Luke 6:9). They favored a third option, “do nothing,” but to Jesus to “do nothing” was “to do evil.” When faced with a choice between good and evil, Jesus never chose evil or neutrality.

Put another way, when faced with a clear choice between good and evil, Jesus never voted for evil or remained neutral.

Following Jesus is about simple choices. The path of life or destruction? Good tree or corrupt tree? Fake follower or faithful? Wise man or fool? With Jesus or against Him? “He that is not with Me is against Me; and He that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad” (Mat. 12:30). He spoke in absolutes. He left no middle ground. Today’s world of relativism convolutes choices and confuses morality: Jesus’ platform simplifies choices and clarifies mislabeled morality.

Discern Mislabeled Morality.

Moral confusion results when matters of expediency are mislabeled as moral issues. Mislabeled morality can result from selfishness, ignorance or dishonesty. Is a tax bill morally evil just because it negatively impacts a saint’s tax return? Are monuments really wholesale endorsements of historical figures’ moral flaws, or is the legal removal of disputed monuments somehow sinful? Have morally benign issues been given moral status in order to counterbalance obvious immoral positions on unarguably moral issues? Does integrity concoct an irrelevant moral argument to

tip the scales and distract from an otherwise clear moral stance? Mislabeled morality is a deadly path:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil;
that put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isa.
5:20).

For example, both major U.S. parties admit the moral obligation to assist the poor and improve the immigration system, and both offer strategies for the issues. Neither party endorses the other's approach, but differing tactics can tackle a moral dilemma without either tactic being morally wrong. One may be more prudent, but the strategies are mere matters of expediency, not matters of righteous simplicity on par with "should the unborn be murdered out of convenience?"

Another example is gay marriage. Is the debate really about equal access to death benefits and legal permissions for couples despite the sinfulness of their relationships? If so, why does equal access to secular benefits require amending God's marriage law? Secular privileges can be granted by an act of Congress without redefining a spiritual institution joined by an act of God. The gay marriage debate is no moral question of equal access for secular rights; it is an immoral quest for equal acceptance for spiritual wrongs. The equality argument is just a smokescreen.

Some assert that morality cannot be legislated: this is a farce. If morality cannot be legislated, who is government authorized to punish (1 Pet. 2:13-14)? If morality cannot be legislated, why are murder and rape illegal? Only the immoral resist moral legislation.

Discern Convoluted Considerations.

Rarely do saints get to vote for another faithful New Testament Christian: their political options are usually two or more lost souls of questionable moral fiber. Perhaps one endorses abortion-on-demand and gay marriage, while another opposes those ideas but is known for drinking or marital infidelity. Do the one's immoral personal faults outweigh the other's immoral policy ambitions? Is it just a matter of one-sinner-is-as-bad-as-another? Is voting simply a matter of "choosing the lesser of two evils"?

As already noted, innocent blood, sexual deviancy, and unpunished violence are the most telling features of a doomed nation (Lev. 18:21-25; Num. 35:31-33): when party distinctions in economics, equality, environment, national defense, and gun control hinge on expediency, prudence, or speculative and inconclusive questions of integrity, should these issues outweigh simple right and wrong in matters of innocent blood, God's definition of marriage, or the government's responsibility to punish?

Jesus never "chose" evil, no matter how "lesser" it was! Neither can saints!

Jesus always chose what was good! So must Christians. Instead of choosing the "lesser of two evils," determine to choose the greatest good! When both candidates hold ungodly stances on beverage alcohol, marijuana, or even gay marriage, **saints have no righteous option to choose!** Inability to stop a fire is not culpability for burning the house. However, an absence of upright options on a few issues does not justify ignoring upright options in areas where a choice exists? Inability to stop a fire is not justification for abandoning those who could be rescued.

Some defend their political decisions by saying, “I am not voting for abortion,” insisting that other issues necessitate voting for candidates that support the distasteful practice. The problem: if two options exist, one endorsing the murder of the unborn and the other opposing it, then the choice is “to do good, or to do evil” (Luke 6:9). “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Mat. 12:30). Can saints truly stand with Jesus while ignoring the silent screams of unborn millions? When a Christian can vote against sin but chooses otherwise, he votes for the sin.

Stop choosing “the lesser of two evils.” Be like Jesus: choose the greatest good.

Which is the greatest good: to vote for a flawed candidate whose policies reflect God’s standards, or to vote for a candidate with a more agreeable personality but whose policies legislate for sin to be imposed and accepted by all, including saints?

Which is the greatest good: to vote for a candidate espousing a morally upright platform and then after he takes office learn that he was lying, or to vote for a candidate holding a morally destitute platform and then after she takes office learn that she was telling the truth?

Discern Now Before It Is Too Late.

Yes, a society can become so morally confused that leadership options become nearly impossible to discern: perhaps one candidate opposes elective abortion but embraces the gay agenda while his opponent endorses elective abortion but opposes the homosexual agenda, or perhaps both candidates endorse both immoral platforms. When a nation’s elected leadership options become that

ungodly, it is a sad reflection upon that nation and the Christians in it!

As “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Mat. 5:13-16), saints must use their influence for good. Are saints being salt and light when they support policies that oppose Jesus’ platform? Are saints being salt and light when they opt for neutrality, not because the righteous choice is hard to discern, but because voting for what is morally right might reduce entitlements or require crossing party lines? Plenty of reasonable obstacles might hinder Christians from voting, but ignoring righteousness for selfishness’ sake is no excuse. Do good, or do evil (Luke 6:9). Be the light (Mat. 5:16). Hide it under a bushel? No! Let it shine!

Saints have more influence than they can measure. John said “greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). When Christians in a land vote for what is right, God is able to make their influence shine further than a mere ballot in a box. When Christians vote for sin, they are no longer the salt of the earth or the light of the world (Mat. 5:13-16), and that nation is on a collision course with judgment.

When no good choice exists concerning abortion, consider other matters. Then if no good choice exists concerning the homosexual agenda, move forward. Then if no good choice exists concerning criminal justice, it is because so many Christians have for so long been voting to elect and support immorality that God has given up on the nation and is letting the people have the ungodly leadership they deserve (Rom. 1:21-24)!

If trends continue, a time will come when moral issues such as abortion and gay marriage will be nonissues

in elections, because no candidates will oppose them. What a horrible day!

Who is on the Lord's side?

Discern Godless Goals.

“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad” (Mat. 12:30). There is a platform of socio-economic and ethic ideals that must be identified for its undeniable opposition to Jesus: it is most certainly “against” Him.

This platform has been revamped and reworded for over eight decades, from the Great Depression to the Vietnam War to the post-9/11 era. Its latest incarnation poses economic goals such as “just distribution of nature’s resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life,” and ethical positions asserting that “values and ideals... are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.” Its earliest format endorses a “socialized and cooperative economic order... to the end that equitable distribution of the means of life be possible,” a “social passion” that sees man’s purpose as “the complete realization of human personality” and that “seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now.”

The platform’s most explicit edition specifically describes the world as they desire to shape it. Because they “deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds,” they “look to the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government.” Economically, they encourage individuals “to contribute to their own betterment,” but “if unable, then society should provide means to satisfy

their basic economic, health, and cultural needs, including, wherever resources make possible, a minimum guaranteed annual income.” In ethics, they “affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience,” and thus view morality as “autonomous and situational.” They “reject those features of... morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities.” Proponents “resist any moves to censor basic scientific research on moral... grounds,” and they insist on “an individual’s right to die with dignity, euthanasia, and the right to suicide.” In sexual ethics (a defining feature of this worldview), it is claimed that people “should be encouraged to realize their own... desires” and “permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire.” They rule that “intolerant attitudes... unduly repress sexual conduct,” and because “many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered ‘evil,’” they refuse “to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults.” As should be expected with a worldview that simultaneously embraces population control and promiscuity, abortion is endorsed as a responsible option for responsible people.

How can it be asserted that this platform is in opposition to Christ? Consider the fundamental ideas that produce their conclusions and positions. The 2003 platform described a “progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment,” they called mankind the “result of unguided evolutionary change,” and styled “nature as self-existing:” their goals spring from a complete rejection of God’s existence. Their earliest

aspirational publication, composed in 1933, was founded on viewing “the universe as self-existing and not created,” that “man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process,” that “modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values,” that “time has passed for theism:” again, a complete rejection of God’s existence. The most detailed platform, produced in 1973, set out to “begin with humans not God, nature not deity.” According to this platform, to “place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience” does “a disservice to the human species” because the existence of Deity “is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of survival and fulfillment of the human race.” Complete. Rejection. Of. God.

What group has a platform that so adamantly rejects moral absolutes and endorses sexual liberty (homosexuality), abortion, and socialized economics? Secular humanists. Their platform has been repeatedly expressed in the Humanist Manifesto of 1933, the Humanist Manifesto II of 1973, and Humanist Manifesto III (also called Humanism and Its Aspirations) of 2003.

These atheistic principles and policies begin with a rejection of Jesus. Can a saint support this platform and still stand with Jesus? Can a soul embrace policies that spring from an atheistic approach to Christ and an antagonistic approach to Christianity and still claim to be “with” Him? In the words of President John F. Kennedy: “Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer.”

Who is on the Lord’s side?

CONCLUSION

No nation endures through politics alone. Christians will not influence this nation to righteousness through votes alone. The ballot box is not the be-all-end-all answer for the state of the union! The nation needs Christians not only to teach the Gospel of Jesus, but to trust the Gospel of Christ, which means sharing and supporting the Political Platform of Jesus! The nation needs Christ's people to stand on Christ's policies and discern Christ's priorities!

His leadership changed the world. As His dying body hung nailed to a cross on a hill near Jerusalem, His war-hardened lead executioner observed, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39, KJV). He achieved unity for His nation and liberty for slaves to sin, although His fullest fruits followed His death. At the height of the conflict when questioned about whether God was on His side, Jesus Christ spoke profoundly: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Mat. 12:30).

Who is on the Lord's side?

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Note 1: Real refugees need help. Stand beside what the former Iron Curtain, ready to put food and basic supplies into the hands of refugees fleeing countries war-torn from ISIS. Watch as thousands, seeking the then-welcoming land of Germany and ferried by train across Hungary from the Serbian border, shuffle the last miles on foot to enter Austria. Leading the horde are men: young men, unhindered by the responsibility of wives or children, whose youth and mobility gain first dibs at whatever aid might be offered. They approach the supplies: water, blankets, cereal bars and other easy-to-carry and easy-to-store food items, and tents. Goods must be rationed, lest the young and healthy first arrivals leave nothing for the thousands of women, children, and elderly to follow. Displeased over the limitations and recognizing their strength in numbers, a press ensues that requires forming a human fence with three other aid workers to shield the supplies and subdue the madness: an uncertain and anxious moment that triggers concern of how dangerous these young men might be and whether helping them is wise. The press reverses, order follows, and eventually families begin to arrive: fathers and mothers with all they own stuffed into backpacks and satchels as they carry and corral their children, pregnant mothers wearied from the uncomfortable train and the less comfortable trek, and aged souls who have left their lifetime homes to escape near-certain death. Foreign faces speaking foreign languages and fleeing foreign lands over foreign wars, yet they wear strikingly familiar expressions: relief from what they escaped, uncertainty over the future, gratitude for strangers’ generosity, and even entitlement from those who demanded more. To ration supplies and give help to those most in need, the limited stock of tents is predetermined to go to pregnant women or mothers with small babies: a wise and necessary stringency, yet tell that to the father whose four year-old son is too old to qualify for a tent to protect them from the forty-degree temperatures of the coming night. They need help. More help.

THE POLITICAL PLATFORM OF JESUS

Taped to every item given was a note printed in Arabic: “This is a gift from Christians to help you on your journey. – The Church of Christ.” Word later came from churches in Austria, Germany, and France, reporting that refugees from Islamic nations were seeking the church and wishing to learn more about Christ because of the kindness of Christians.

Real refugees need help, whether at a European border or America’s southern border. They also need vetted. To welcome all and ignore the threat of the few is as foolish as turning all away because of the threat of a few.

Speaking The Truth In Love: Answering With Meekness And Fear

Chad Dollahite



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INTRODUCTION

The Bible does not always satisfy humans' curiosities. We are not even told if Jesus used a real-life event or if it was simply a parable. Nevertheless, one can imagine this particular Jewish man rising early in the morning and going to great pains to dress and look His very best as He prepared to go to the temple. Once there, He drew Himself into an upright posture and began to pray, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector" (Luke 18:11). He uttered that last phrase, He spoke a little louder, so that maybe—just maybe—"that sinful tax collector" would hear Him. Then He emphasized the personal pronouns as He continued, "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:12). By contrast, the tax collector stood slumped, feeling wholly unworthy even to lift his eyes toward heaven, as he prayed, simply, "God, be

merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13).

While we do not know whether some of the particulars related here are actually true or not, what we do know is that, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, the tax collector “went down to his house justified rather than the other” (Luke 18:14). This parable serves as a very powerful illustration to the truth that undergirds this study: the heart matters! The Pharisee’s arrogant heart led him to believe that God was somehow privileged to have that man on “His side.” That same arrogance led him to believe he was somehow superior to other men. In short, that arrogance led him to trust in himself that he was righteous (Luke 18:9), despise others (Luke 18:9), and to exalt himself (Luke 18:14). Left unchanged, his prideful heart would lead him to condemnation.

What does “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) mean? Further, what does it mean to “give a defense... with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15)? These are the questions that must be answered for God’s people most effectively to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The entirety of God’s Word is truth (Psa. 119:160), and when one studies the entirety of Scripture, he learns that God’s people are not just called upon to speak the truth, but to speak the truth with a proper heart, or attitude. Christians absolutely must come to grip with the fact that we cannot be what God would have us to be if we do not speak the truth with the right attitude and in the right way. The bulk of this study will center around 1 Peter 3:15, observing that Christians must achieve balance, respect the power of

words, and strive diligently to find the best possible way to speak the truth of Jesus Christ in order to help others get to heaven.

BALANCE

One of the most difficult things in life is finding and maintaining balance. Balance is necessary in life and in Christianity, yet it is often misunderstood. Balance does not necessarily mean equal parts of something. For example, balancing sleeping and waking hours does not mean twelve hours of sleep and twelve hours awake each day. Rather, balance means maintaining appropriate amounts of each thing (Blackwell, 53-54). For Christians, teaching the gospel to others requires balance; this does not necessarily mean equal parts of “telling it like it is” and silence (or “holding back”), but appropriate amounts of these things. Remember, too, that balance is not merely straddling the fence or compromising the truth, nor is it lukewarmness (see Rev. 3:15-16) (Blackwell, 55). The Lord Jesus Christ never straddled the fence, He never compromised, and He was anything but lukewarm, yet He is the perfect example of balance.

How do Christians maintain balance in teaching the gospel? The answer is right within the text of 1 Peter 3:15:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

A simple breakdown of the verse shows Christians how to maintain biblical balance in taking the gospel to a lost and dying—and often religiously misunderstood/confused—world.

First, the Christian must live the truth. By inspiration, Peter says, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.” Sanctify means simply to set apart. In other words, Christians must set Jesus apart as Lord of their hearts (and, thus, their lives). This means a person must be living the Christian life before he can help others to become Christians. The world may know very little about Christianity, but one thing readily recognized is a hypocrite, and one who is trying to bring others to Christ while not living such himself is just that—a hypocrite. The book of Acts begins by telling the reader what Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1); that is, Jesus first put the Father’s will into practice in His own life, and then He taught it to others. That is the example of the Master, the Savior. Further, Paul wrote by inspiration to the young evangelist Timothy:

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine.
Continue in them, for in doing this you will
save both yourself and those who hear you (1
Tim. 4:16).

Over and over, Scripture teaches that a person must obey God’s will first before attempting to teach others.

Second, the Christian must know the truth. Becoming a Christian requires some level of knowldge; that is understood. But, here, we refer to Peter’s admonition, “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). Too often, one obeys the gospel and, within a relatively short period of time, the person laments how he cannot teach others because “I just don’t know enough.” Surely, a cursory look at 1 Peter 3:15 shows the foolishness of such a mindset. How can one ever help others to come to the knowledge of the truth if he/she has not spent ample time in the Bible to know how to help them to do so? It ought to be the case that no one on earth is more studious and knowledgeable of the Word of God than God’s own people, Christians. Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be ready always to give an answer—a defense—for the hope that is within us; souls depend upon it!

Third, the Christian must speak the truth. 1 Peter 3:15 finishes with the admonition to be ready to give an answer “with meekness and fear.” In other words, as Paul instructed, “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). This is sometimes the most difficult aspect of evangelism for Christians, but we must remember, as the Holy Spirit teaches us through Paul, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Cor. 8:1). We must balance knowledge and love because while knowledge “puffs up,” love “builds up.” More attention will be given to the specifics of “meekness and fear” in the third section of this chapter, but suffice it here to say, that if Christians cannot balance living the truth, knowing the truth, and speaking the truth in love, then we will be hindered in our efforts to teach the truth of Almighty God every time.

WORD POWER

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Pro. 18:21). Words are so powerful! Jesus Himself tells us how our words can justify or condemn us (Mat. 12:37), and the wise man was inspired to write, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth; And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” (Pro. 15:23). The source of the old adage, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never hurt me” is unknown to this writer, but the adage is patently false! The Bible is clear: words are powerful, either for good or for bad. For God’s people to help others escape the condemnation of hell, we must respect the power of words, either to help or hinder the spread of the gospel. Most recognize the power of false words, rightly opposing such, but what is too often the case, is God’s people failing to recognize and respect the power of how (and when) words of truth are spoken. Sometimes this is intentional, but often it is simply the result of a failure to respect the power of words.

Bob was a fifteen-year-old boy, recently baptized into Christ, and the son of a gospel preacher. Bob’s grandmother on his mother’s side had just died, and the family was traveling some distance for the funeral. This was Bob’s first experience with the death of a close relative, and his mother’s side of the family were not members of the body of Christ. In the car as they were traveling, Bob hears his parents talking. During the course of the conversation, Bob’s father makes a statement, “It’s a shame that she’s in hell forever now.” Bob never said a word, but now Bob is grown and still

remembers that conversation rather vividly. Bob is not a member of the Lord's church anymore; in fact, Bob has nothing to do with anything spiritual at all. Those cold, calloused words of his father often ring in his mind as he frequently, unapologetically tells others, "I'll never be involved in anything so heartless as that." Words are powerful.

Sandy is a secretary for a member of upper management at a manufacturing plant. One day, one of the guys from the technology area is in her office working on her computer. The young tech is a member of the Lord's church and even teaches Bible class and fills in from time to time preaching at the local congregation. The young man overhears Sandy and a coworker talking about religion. Sandy is a Catholic, and she is talking about the recent death of the Catholic Pope, as well as the ongoing selection process for the new Pope. When he can no longer stand it, the young tech jumps into the conversation and says, "The Pope is about the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard of, as is Roman Catholic doctrine, period; how anyone can follow that nonsense is beyond me, but I'll tell you one thing...that old man is a true believer now!" Sandy became very upset and felt personally attacked; she never had another word of discussion with the young tech about spiritual matters. Words are powerful.

Holly is a young college student; she grew up in the Baptist faith and is dating a young man who is a member of the Lord's church. Holly is studying with her boyfriend and the local preacher at the church of Christ. In their first study, she interrupts the preacher

to say, “I appreciate your willingness to study with me and help me see where you’re coming from, but I love God, and I study my Bible. It just doesn’t seem to me like you think I’m a true Christian, and that bothers me.” The preacher smiles reassuringly and promises her no one is questioning her heart or her sincerity, but, “We are all sitting here opening up the Word of God to see what God has to say about these matters that divide us religiously.” He relates the story of how his own mother, steeped in denominational error, began studying with her new husband. The more she studied, the more she began to see some things she had never noticed before. She soon realized she had not been following the Bible like she thought she had. This set Holly’s mind at ease—albeit just a little—and she continued to study with the preacher. Before long, Holly realized that she, too, was seeing things she had never seen or studied before and, within just a few weeks, Holly was baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Words are powerful.

To be clear, how truth is spoken does not negate truth. Paul spoke of some who preached the truth out of impure motives, yet he rejoiced in the fact that the truth was being spoken nonetheless (Phi. 1:15-18). Thank God, many have obeyed the truth, seeing it as just that—the truth—in spite of a callous, mean-spirited, tactless, and/or heartless presentation of such. But, unless and until we respect the tremendous power of words, we will be handicapped in taking the gospel to the world. Let us all as Christians resolve to remind ourselves regularly that words have power, for life or for death. Let us resolve that our words will be life-giving

words that will help others come to Christ, never being a wedge to drive them away from the soul-saving, unique, heaven-sent gospel of Jesus Christ.

A BETTER WAY TO SPEAK

The previous illustrations are true stories (told from this writer's best recollection with names changed) that hopefully help us to see that, often, we need to seek a better way to speak to others about Jesus Christ and His one church. Thankfully, God, in His wisdom, has given us a better way to speak. As noted previously, 1 Peter 3:15 tells Christians to set Jesus apart as Lord of their lives (following His will in all things), being ready to give a defense (or an answer) for the hope that is within them. But, Peter also tells Christians (by inspiration) just exactly how we are to give that answer: in meekness and in fear. What does it mean to give an answer with "meekness and fear"?

Fear is more properly termed reverence, or godly fear. When we talk to others about the gospel, we need to be serious and realize that the souls of men and women hang in the balance. We are not dealing with trivial matters when talking to others about Jesus Christ; we are dealing with eternal life and death. If we do not realize this, we are immediately hindering efforts to take the gospel to those who are lost in sin. Talking about the Bible specifically—and spiritual matters in general—is not about who is right, but about what is right. Take this seriously! Paul took this so seriously that he remarked how he could wish himself accused from Christ if such might effect the salvation of his

misguided Jewish countrymen (Rom. 9:3). Speaking to others about Jesus is not about how much I know; it is about understanding how “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10) and, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). Profound reverence for God means we approach this task soberly.

Meekness has to do with gentleness and humility. Many are familiar with the simple (yet very appropriate) definition of meekness as “strength under control.” A Christian with knowledge of God’s Word certainly may have the skill with the Spirit’s sword (Eph. 6:17) to shew the false beliefs of his friend/coworker/relative/acquaintance to pieces, but meekness means balancing that skill with gentleness in so doing. Christians must learn, more so than anyone, the practice of “tasting our words” before speaking them (Abrams, 24). So often, it is not what is said, but how it is said. When words are spoken with meekness, they often become far more palatable to the hearer(s). No wonder, then, that the Holy Spirit admonishes Christians through His servant Paul, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). When seeking to practice giving an answer with meekness, it helps to remember the acronym T.H.I.N.K. (Abrams, 84).

First, T.H.I.N.K. about whether what is about to be said is TRUE. In other words, is it true to God’s Word? This ought to go without saying, but the very first thing one needs to determine before speaking is whether what he is about to say is actually biblically

accurate. This also means (as Peter admonishes in 1 Pet. 3:15) being “ready” to back up what is said with Scripture. The mentality of “I don’t know where it is, but I know it’s right” simply will not suffice. A child of God must love God’s Word and spend time in the Word to be able to show others where in Scripture to find God’s will. So, first, ask, “Is what I’m about to say true to the Bible?”

Second, T.H.I.N.K. about whether what is about to be said is HELPFUL. People will often ask “loaded questions” that have nothing to do with the subject being discussed or their own personal situation. One may ask, “So, do you believe a person who is on his way to be baptized, but drops dead of a heart attack, will be lost eternally in hell?” The Christian may have intellectual knowledge of the answer, but is simply answering “yes” going to be helpful, or would it be more helpful to say something like, “We could look at hypothetical situations all day, but, first, why don’t we look and see what the Bible teaches us about baptism and make sure we’re following that?” There may be situations where we are required to answer those “loaded questions,” but, at the very least, ask first, “Is what I’m about to say going to help this discussion proceed or bring it to a sudden and abrupt conclusion?” If the answer is the latter, look for a better way to answer; more often than not, that better way is there, if we will merely seek it.

Third, T.H.I.N.K. about whether what is about to be said is INSPIRING. Will the statement about to be made be conducive to this person’s obedience to the gospel, or will it hinder such? One could spend a great

deal of time expounding on why the use of mechanical instruments in worship is sinful, but that may not fit the “inspiring” aspect of the T.H.I.N.K. acronym. In other words, it almost always is better to begin with a discussion of authority, studying what authority is and how God expects us to submit to His authority in all we do (whether salvation, worship, or Christian living). This writer has had multiple Bible studies, even recently, where the discussion of mechanical instruments of music in worship was put off in favor of “working up to that” later in the study, with the study participants later making statements to the effect of, “Oh, so that’s why you don’t use instruments in worship: there is no authority for them in the New Testament.” Often, finding some kind of common ground in a study can be inspiring, in that the person to whom we are speaking realizes we do not disagree on every single thing; more often than not, this inspires open hearts to continue studying to find out exactly why we disagree on other specific beliefs. Always think first, “Will what I am about to say inspire this person to keep studying and learning God’s truth?”

Fourth, T.H.I.N.K. about whether what is about to be said is NECESSARY. It is not always necessary to tell someone, “You’re wrong.” In fact, such is quite often a mistake. It is far better to study with someone, helping them see what God’s Word says on any given subject, until he realizes on his own that he has been mistaken about a particular doctrine/belief. Such will have a much greater impact on that soul than simply saying, “No, you’re wrong about that.” Again, there

may be times when the person just is not “getting it,” prompting the need to “spell it out,” but, most often, with a little guidance and saying only that which is truly necessary, God’s Word will show people where they are mistaken. When Jesus encountered a Jewish lawyer who was clearly wrong pertaining to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:25-37), He did not just tell the man, “You’re wrong,” but He told a parable that concluded with the penetrating question, “Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (Luke 10:36). The man saw his error and had to admit, “He who showed mercy” (Luke 10:37). Jesus’ final words have echoed throughout the centuries: “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). Before speaking, always ask, “Is this necessary?”

Fifth, T.H.I.N.K. about whether what is about to be said is KIND. This involves examining ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5) to be certain that we are more concerned about winning souls than winning arguments. We need more genuine concern for the souls of men and women when speaking the truth of God’s Word. When Jesus was at the house of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Mary understood that the most important thing was sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn about spiritual matters, while Martha was “distracted with much serving” (Luke 10:40). Martha needed a mild rebuke, but she was not a “bad” person; rather, she was distracted and misguided. Jesus very kindly and gently said to her that “the good part” was focusing on the spiritual first and making everything else second to that. His kind, gentle answer undoubtedly accomplished far more than

a stern rebuke. How we need more kindness in speaking the gospel truth! Hear the wise man's inspired words: "A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Pro. 15:1). Many an open door has been slammed shut because God's people did not speak with kindness.

Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." Winning souls is not always easy, and it requires much wisdom. Often, winning souls means we need to find a better way of speaking God's truth to others. And, a better way of speaking begins when we **T.H.I.N.K.** before speaking; this means ensuring that what we say is true, helpful, inspiring, necessary, and kind. Remember, "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health" (Pro. 12:18). When we think as God thinks, we will speak as God would have us to speak; more souls will be led to Christ; and eternity will be impacted positively by our efforts!

CONCLUSION

Joe is a regular guy. He works a good job at the local factory, serving as a shift leader. He asked his girlfriend Sarah to move in with him six months ago, and she agreed. Things have been great with Joe and Sarah's relationship. Just this past Sunday, Joe and Sarah slept in like always and then went for a late breakfast at Cracker Barrel. As they were finishing up, Sarah could no longer hold back, and she told Joe she was pregnant. They both were a little excited and scared at the same time; this was the beginning of a whole new chapter in

their lives.

Monday at work, Joe is noticeably deep in thought, and his best friend Dave asks him what is going on. Joe informs Dave in confidence of Sarah's pregnancy, and he tells Dave the whole situation has him thinking about his life. Joe was brought up by religious parents, but he never really cared much for it, and they never were very faithful to any church. But, now, with a baby on the way, Joe realizes he is going to be bringing a child into the world, and it has him thinking about things beyond this world and this life. So, Joe tells Dave he is thinking about looking for a church to attend; he wants to be able to tell his child one day about God and where this earth and universe came from. He wants his child to know about and be prepared for eternity. Dave is a believer in God, but he does not really attend a church; nevertheless, he tells Joe he thinks it is great that Joe is thinking about these things, especially with a baby on the way. Of course, there is no shortage of churches to choose from, so Joe begins his search and visits one the following Sunday. Dave leaves for vacation early that next Monday morning and is gone the entire week, so Joe visits the second church that following Sunday. Monday, Joe and Dave exchange pleasantries and talk about Dave's vacation. Then, Dave asks Joe, "Hey, did you end up visiting any churches?"

"I did," Joe replied. "I visited one two Sundays ago, and I visited another yesterday."

"Well, how did it go?" Dave asked.

"At the first church," Joe began, "the preacher basically told me I was going to hell; he had a lesson

on judgment, and he talked a lot about how people are going to answer in the judgment for sins like drinking, drugs, gambling...and fornication...you know, like living together outside of marriage.”

“Oh,” replied Dave glumly. “Well, what about the second church you visited?”

“I went to that second church and, well...that preacher preached on marriage and the honor of marriage. Would you believe that preacher basically told me I was going to hell, too?”

“That is something else!” Dave exclaimed. “So, what now? Are you going to visit a third one this Sunday?”

“I’m not,” answered Joe. “I’m going to go talk more to that preacher at the first church.”

“You are?” Dave mused. “I thought he essentially said you were going to hell?”

“Oh, he did,” remarked Joe.

“So, what gives? That’s what the other preacher said, too. What makes that first guy so special?”

Joe answered, “Well, that’s the thing; they both preached from the Bible and basically told me I was going to hell in my current state, but that first guy seemed like he was genuinely sad about it! Now, I want to know more about what the Bible says and how I can avoid that fate.”

This anecdote illustrates well the truths covered in this study from 1 Peter 3:15. The fact of the matter is, when speaking the truth, it is often not so much about what we say as it is how we say it. Joe needed to hear the truth that he was lost in sin, but one preacher presented

that truth without balancing it with meekness and fear, while the other preacher realized the power of words and found a better way of speaking God's truth. May God help us all to balance living out God's truth, knowing it well enough to teach others who do not know the truth, and speaking the truth in love. Furthermore, may we all realize the power of life and death in our words and, knowing such, give great effort to finding the best possible way to speak the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. By inspiration, God has given us all we need to accomplish these things in the succinct statement of 1 Peter 3:15—"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Truth matters. Attitude matters. Let us be about our Father's business, in meekness and in fear!

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Dancing, The Prom And Other Temptations Faced By Young People

Glenn Colley



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John the Baptist (called that because he baptized people) was the subject of prophecy seven centuries before his birth: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isa. 40:3).

Matthew identifies that voice as John's. "For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of

the Lord; make His paths straight” (Mat. 3:2-3).

Zacharias and Elizabeth, well advanced in years at the time, were John’s parents. An angel came to Zacharias and said, “Your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall call his name John” (Luke 1:13).

Consider the admirable qualities of this John:

He practiced self denial: “Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey” (Mat. 3:4).

He was a courageous man: “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’” (Mat. 3:7).

He was obedient to Christ: “But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him” (Mat. 3:15).

He was a powerful preacher: “Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5).

He was a man of great humility: “And he preached, saying, ‘There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose’” (Mark 1:7).

He was a holy man (Mark 6:20).

There are actually five different kings in the New Testament bearing the name Herod: Herod the Great (the king we meet in the first chapters of Matthew’s gospel, the monarch responsible for the murders of the

children in Bethlehem), the Herod in Acts 12 who was eaten of worms, the Herod Agrippa in Acts 28 who told Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” Herod Antipas, and his brother, Herod Philip.

Herod the Great had several wives and many children. His son, Herod Antipas, who ruled after him for 43 years, is the Herod who killed John the Baptist. Like his father, he was shrewd and manipulative, a lover of luxury and power, and a designer of great architectural schemes. He was cunning and ruthless and the Lord Jesus knew this king, referring to him as “that fox” (Luke 13:32). He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus during the hearings before the crucifixion.

Herodias was the wife of Herod Antipas. She had been married to his half-brother Phillip, and she was also the daughter of another of Herod’s half brother who had been murdered by his own father; that is, by her grandfather, Herod the Great. There was an occasion when Herod was away in Rome, that he met Herodias and fell deeply in lust with her, though he and she were both married. He dismissed his wife and took his brother’s wife.

**(Vs. 14)— “John the Baptist is risen from the dead,
and therefore these powers are at work in him.”**

Remember that Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” They responded, “...Some say... John the Baptist” (Mat. 16:14). I believe they were thinking of this statement, in verse 14, made by Herod Antipas.

Whenever a man does an evil thing, the whole

world becomes his enemy. Inwardly, he cannot fully command his thoughts; and although he forgets his guilt for a while, his thoughts eventually return to the terrible thing that he has done. When Herod heard of Jesus' miracles, he immediately declared that it was John. Apparently his guilt made him fearful—even paranoid.

John the Baptist never performed any miracles, yet Herod believed John had come back in the person of Jesus who was performing miracles. Herod was haunted by his own imagination.

Herod had imprisoned John for his teaching. There were no first amendment rights on this occasion.

(Vs. 17)—For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.

Josephus tells us this occurred in the castle of Machaerus, adjoining the Dead Sea. The ruins are still there today on that desolate ridge, surrounded by fearful ravines, overlooking the East side of the Sea.

(Vs. 18)— “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife...”

John was a prophet and spoke for God here. The word prophet means “speaking for God.” The law he referenced is the law of God on marriage, begun in the garden of Eden and sustained until the trumpet blows.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24).

For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband (Rom. 7:2).

(Vs. 19-20)—“Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not, for Herod feared John and protected him.”

This describes Herodias’ dark view of a man who would dare speak God’s truth about the marriage. She believed that she could only relax in the joy of her marriage if John was killed. She has many descendants today who want to punish any messenger of God’s word if that word conflicts with their lifestyles. Perhaps the Spirit thought of this when He inspired Paul to write, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16).

Now, observe: Herodias would have killed John sooner, given the chance, and Herod knew it. That fact will become critical in this sermon. Herod didn’t view John as did his wife. He respected John and protected him from a power-drunken wife who would sacrifice John on the altar of her own sinful preferences.

(Vs. 20)—“...For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.”

Herod did many good things under the influence of John the Baptist.

He feared John and he also protected him. “No one will harm him or he will answer to me. Is he getting

enough to eat? See to that. Does he have a blanket for the cold nights?” Herod looked after him. But also notice: “When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.”

Herod heard John gladly. Can you imagine the scene in the luxurious apartments of Machaerus? Imagine Queen Herodias wandering around looking for her husband, unable to find him, only to realize he was down in the dungeon again sitting in a dark corridor with John and talking to him and listening to him: “What do you mean the axe is laid to the root of the trees?” “I don’t understand that the coming One will baptize with fire and the Spirit.” “You say that he is going to be king, but then you say that he will be the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world?” Herod was greatly puzzled. I don’t suppose Herod understood everything John taught, “yet he liked to listen to him” (v. 20).

(Vs. 21)— “Then an opportune day came when Herod, on his birthday, gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.”

There are two occasions in Scripture when a birthday is mentioned; here, and in Genesis 40:20, in reference to Pharaoh’s celebration. We live in an age when parties like these are all too common. The myth has been circulated by the media that we were all prudish and stiff before the sixties and that the great contribution of that decade was that it introduced the sexual revolution. The irony of that is that the era of sexual liberation was a lie. It isn’t the people who seek

sex outside of marriage who are free, but rather the people who live in God-approved marriages and enjoy intimacy. Being slaves to desires and infatuations is not liberation. It is the opposite. It is slavery.

This was a feast where a sexual dance would have seemed appropriate. Such a dance would seem embarrassing under some respectable circumstances, but not at this party. This party was a cesspool. One can't swim at a cesspool very long without becoming diseased. There were consequences to actions—consequences which Herod had not anticipated. Sin's consequences are always worse than the sinner expects.

An opportune day came. God once told Cain that if he would do well, he would be accepted, but, if not, "...sin lies at the door." In other words, Satan will always provide an opportune time for our greatest temptations. Judas waited for his opportunity to betray Christ, and it came. If you plan for sin, and wait for sin, then sin will come. It is a fearful thing. It doesn't just happen. It is not like catching a cold. You are not a victim. Sinners are waiting for an opportune time. Beware sinner! You sow a wind and you reap a whirlwind. That's God's law.

(Vs. 22) — “The daughter of Herodias herself.”

It must be unusual for a step-daughter of the king to dance before a group in this way. We wonder what could have been the motivation for doing so.

(Vs. 22)—And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those

who sat with him, the king said to the girl, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” He also swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”

The effect watching her had on the king is a little shocking in the clear light of day. It must have seemed more appropriate in that atmosphere of drinking and lasciviousness to say something such as this: “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you. Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.” Imagine the shouts and bursts of laughter in different parts of the room. Imagine the laughter every time someone uttered words of coarse jesting. They couldn’t wait to hear her petition. The atmosphere must have been crowded with anticipation.

Why did Herod offer this ridiculous thing? He knew Herodias was thirsting for John’s blood, but he didn’t see this coming. Those in such moments of celebration will, in a moment of capriciousness, say and do what they may later bitterly regret. And parties like these happen all the time: perhaps not with murder involved, but surely with compromise. Alcohol and drugs are often included to enhance the euphoria, and people escape reality. Yet, eventually the lights come on and like Herod, people realize they’ve made terrible mistakes.

Moments of celebration are joyous in life, but are never a good excuse for forsaking God. Consider that high school seniors have graduations. Families drive long distances to celebrate weddings. Young married couples celebrate a new promotion; and older couples celebrate

retirement. Each of these innocent celebrations can, but do not have to, become moments of temptation like the one faced by Herod Antipas.

The prom, however, is somewhat different from these innocent times of celebration. By its very nature and the nature of the activity at its core, it will be an arena of temptation.

A devout mother, several years ago, was asked by her two teen daughters about going to the prom with boyfriends. The mother sat them down and opened up the passage we're discussing today and made it clear that they would not be allowed to go. Why did she do that? It was because she knew the prom was an arena of temptation. Years have passed and her daughters, now with husbands and children of their own, are thankful for a mother who protected them from temptation. I suggest that she was more righteous than many preachers in pulpits today, even in the Lord's church—preachers who do not object to teenagers attending this banquet, nor even participating in the lascivious activity that occurs there.

I want to be clear. Christians should stay away from these parties. Parents should train their children to not attend the prom or similar events where celebration commonly involves compromise. This teaching should occur when they are very young, so that tender hearts, when they are juniors and seniors in high school, will have made that decision long ago.

There are three important Scriptures for you to consider before attending the dances or allowing your children to attend:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness... (Gal. 5:19).

...Envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21).

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mat. 5:28).

Males are enticed by sight, sound, and touch. Listen to the lyrics of current songs. Is there seductive sight involved in the common skimpy clothing of girl's today? Are males aroused by the sensual movements of a girl's body? Is there, as with Herod, an "opportune time"—a creation of the kind of atmosphere in which common decency is devalued? Is this where a Christian's influence will be maintained, or will it be hurt in this place? Except for the power the king had to behead John, is Herod's party so different from today's prom?

Parents, say to your teens, "I love you. I know this is important to you right now, but God made us your Mom and Dad for a reason: To guide you in what is right. I hope you'll understand why we cannot let you go. I know that you'll only have one chance to be young and attend the prom. But I want you to think of this differently. You'll only have one chance to put the Lord first at this important moment of your life."

(Vs. 24) — “So she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?”

Salome went out from what was probably a “Men Only” function.

(Vs. 24-25) — “And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist!’ Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’”

Be careful not to compromise your faith. Your children will see and may one day go farther with that compromise than you’d ever considered going. Salome embellished her mother’s words by demanding the execution “right now,” and demanding John’s head, “on a platter.” The girl was a pawn. She was totally under the influence of her mother. The evil in parents, if unaddressed, can be multiplied in their children.

(Vs. 26)—“And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.”

Notice this light switch moment. There are many of these moments in life. Herod was swept up in the licentious pleasure of the moment while ignoring his duty, his faithfulness to his wife, and any adherence to right living.

Herodias murdered John in order that she might have peace. She forgot that while she wouldn’t have to meet John again, she would still have to meet God.

These peers had been watching the girl dance and loving it. Her request is prophetic of the mentality of

some in our culture today. Anyone who dares to speak against our sexually charged lifestyle—its perversions and pleasures—should have to die!

Isn't Herod's response an example of what we mean when we say that man can make just about anything his god? His own pride, his unlawful wife and his job became his gods.

It is interesting to notice that, within a year or two after John's beheading, Jesus would be standing before this same Herod Antipas, listening to his mocking. Once again, Herod would play a part in the death of an innocent man. This time it would be the death of the spotless Savior of the world—the only One who could have redeemed Herod from the blood guiltiness of His past.

Atheism: The Fool Has Said In His Heart

Terrance Brownlow-Dindy, Sr.



Terrance Brownlow-Dindy, Sr. has been married to Shenia for twenty six years and together they have four children; Destyni, Terrance Jr., Gabriel, and KeVontre. He serves as the minister for the Sixth Street church of Christ in Lakeland, Florida. He is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma (BFA), the Brown Trail School of Preaching, and the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver (MBS). Terrance is an instructor with the Florida School of Preaching and an assistant director of the Jamaica Campaign for Christ evangelistic mission team. Terrance has done local work in Texas, Missouri, Louisiana and Florida.

INTRODUCTION

Resistant to philosophical and scientific truth, a world renown atheistic philosopher, when asked in a debate to account for the origin and complexity of the human eye, responded: “It just grewed.” Fifty years have transpired since that widely publicized discussion, and the explanations of atheism regarding the reality of the universe and the vast marvels that comprise it are no less foolish. Commenting in his book, Richard Dawkins (Great Thinkers), upon the overly simplistic explications of some scientists concerning the existence and function of complex biological systems, Ransom Poytrhess, assistant Professor of Biology at Houghton

College in New York, cites a statement from a PBS presentation on evolution:

Here's how some scientists think some eyes may have evolved: The simple light-sensitive spot on the skin of some ancestral creature gave it some tiny survival advantage, perhaps allowing it to evade a predator. Random changes then created a depression in the light-sensitive patch, a deepening pit that made "vision" a little sharper. At the same time, the pit's opening gradually narrowed, so light entered through a small aperture, like a pinhole camera....Eventually, the light-sensitive spot evolved into a retina, the layer of cells and pigment at the back of the human eye. Over time a lens formed at the front of the eye. (15-16)

Rational minds may never cease to be amazed by the fact that many anti-theist would rather diminish their intellectual perspectives and academic positions to levels of abject absurdity than to embrace that conclusion which both science and philosophy warrant: There is a an infinite and intelligent Designer of the universe, and **He is the God of the Bible!**

With great appreciation for the Southaven congregation's long-standing love for God, and their unwavering commitment to the integrity of the church of Christ and the soundness of the doctrine of Christ, I express the utmost gratitude for the invitation to contribute to their labor of love - the Power Lectures.

ATHEISM'S PERSISTENCE

A young high school football player suffered a wrist injury during the course of a big defensive play in the

final game of the season. When the player's aching wrist was x-rayed a few hours later, he was diagnosed with a wrist sprain, and sent home with a brace and instructions to apply ice for a few days. Upon the conclusion of the football season, the young athlete played through the course of the subsequent basketball season, all the while fighting through the nagging wrist pain that refused to subside. When his concerned parents took the student athlete for a second opinion, x-rays revealed that the wrist that was previously diagnosed as sprained was actually broken. Months had passed. The orthopedic doctor emphasized to the parents that, as they have witnessed, the problem is not going to fix itself. Without surgery, the issue would persist.

Much like the chronic injury described in the story above, atheism has proven to be a persistent problem. Three thousand years ago, the Sweet Psalmist of Israel boldly affirmed, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psa. 14:1a). King David lamented over the atheism of his day.

The apostle Paul, one thousand years later, in advancing God's case for the Gentile need of the Gospel of Christ, noted by Divine inspiration how that the Gentile segments of the human race had separated themselves from God through the rejection of the Creator. The apostle writes,

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the

glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:21-23).

The perceptive student of the text will note that in the writing of this passage of Holy Scripture a millennium after the penning of the Fourteenth Psalm, the Holy Spirit again emphasized the foolishness of atheism.

We would love to think that the Spirit-inspired authors of the Holy Scriptures emphasizing the foolishness of atheism throughout the history of man's existence would be a deterrent to the senseless position, yet in a 2015 article entitled *How Many Atheists Are There?* published on the Psychology Today website, author and Professor of Sociology and Secular Studies at Pitzer College, Phil Zuckerman cites:

According to the latest international survey data, as reported by Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera in the recently published Oxford Handbook of Atheism, there are approximately 450-500 million non-believers in God worldwide, which amounts to about 7% of the global adult population. And according to the Pew Research Center, if we broaden the category to include all non-religious people, in general – those unaffiliated adults who do not identify with any religion – we're talking 1.1 billion people....As such, "non-religious" is actually the third largest "religion" in the world, coming only behind Christianity (in first place) and Islam (in second). (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-secular-life/201510/how-many-atheists-are-there>)

Christian apologist Kyle Butt notes in the introduction of his book *Always Be Ready* that,

If you had asked my youth group in high school 20 years ago if we knew a person who claimed to be an atheist, you would have gotten a lot of blank stares....That was 20 years ago. Fast-forward 20 years and the situation in the United States is very different. For the past several years I have taught Bible class for the 15-18 year olds at summer camp. A few years ago I started asking the question: "How many of you know someone who is an atheist?" The first year I asked, out of the 42 kids I had in class, 32 of them said they knew an atheist. (1)

Christian friend, atheism is an ever growing concern. It has been this author's experience that not only are our Christian youth able to affirm that they know an atheist (or atheists), but some of them are even being influenced to the point of adopting the anti-theist doctrine. The persistence that anti-theists have used in the advancement of their aversion to God must be met with equal or greater diligence by those of us who wish to convey the reality of the matter. Jason Jackson rightfully notes in his article, *The Making of An Atheist*, "Left uncultured, shallow soil is fertile ground for seeds of unbelief in the hearts of many—especially young people. Consequently, we must engage our youth with overwhelming evidence for God's existence."

The Bible's Fourteenth Psalm provides a perfect platform of truth to exercise such diligence and to begin such engagement. Here the Holy Spirit, speaking by the Sweet Psalmist of Israel, discloses why atheism is such a problematic position.

ATHEISM IS FOOLISH

Ironically, those who assume the atheistic position, and especially scholars in the realm of academia, frequently employ the tactic of denigrating the intellect of theists. In an article in *The New Yorker* entitled *All Scientists Should Be Militant Atheists*, physicist Lawrence M. Krauss boasts, “Sometimes, I refer to the fact that religion and science are often in conflict; from time to time I ridicule religious dogma.” Krauss, later in the article, proceeds to such ridicule against Christian religion declaring, “Five hundred years of science have liberated humanity from the shackles of enforced ignorance.” (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/newsdesk/all-scientists-should-be-militant-atheists>).

According to Zuckerman, “non-theists tend to be more highly educated and intellectually oriented (on average) than their believing peers.” (*How Many Atheists Are There?* psychologytoday.com)

Poythress points out that influential New Atheist Richard Dawkins often “insults people’s intelligence if they are not atheists,” and that “In his eyes, intelligence and atheism go hand in hand” (14). Poythress goes on to quote Dawkins from a 1989 *New York Times* article entitled *Richard Dawkins Review of Blueprints: Solving the Mystery of Evolution*, citing how that the renown atheist opines, “It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane...” Scripture, philosophy, and true science attribute the ignorance, stupidity, and insanity to atheism rather than to belief in God.

Atheism is foolish because Scripture says so –

David, the 11th-10th century B.C. king of Israel, initiates Psalm 14 with the clear and emphatic truth: “The fool has said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa. 14:1a). It is not within the scope of this study to set forth the vast evidence for the inerrancy and historical validity of the Holy Scriptures. This work assumes that such evidence has already been honestly evaluated and accepted. The Holy Scripture is “God breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), and speaks with clarity on the matter.

While many within the upper echelon of academia seek to assign labels such as “stupid” to the believer (as noted above), the Bible affirms that such stupidity is the plight of the infidel. Frequently within the Spirit-inspired utterances of the seventh century B.C. prophet Jeremiah, God employs the term “brutish” in reference to those Judeans who have forsaken belief in the true God of heaven and have embraced pagan idolatry – which position is tantamount to atheism. Note the following oracle of God’s prophet,

...the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? For to thee doth it

appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee. But [infidel idolaters] are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities. (Jer. 10:3-8)

The term “brutish,” used four times in Jeremiah’s prophecy in reference to atheistic idolaters, is an archaic English adjective meaning, “resembling, befitting, or typical of a brute or beast; strongly and grossly sensual; showing little intelligence or sensibility” (*Merriam-Webster.com*). The English Standard Version and the New American Standard both translate the Hebrew term ba’ar in Jeremiah 10:8 “stupid.”

In the sweeping segment of rationale that is Isaiah chapters 40-48, the prophet of God thrusts into overdrive the challenge set forth by Jehovah in Isaiah 1:18 - “Come let us reason together.” Here the irrationality of rejecting the True and Almighty God of heaven is put on full display through Isaiah’s God-breathed discourse. Perhaps chapter 44 most adequately demonstrates the foolishness of rejecting God and replacing Him with idols. Isaiah relates how that the Judeans commonly engaged in the practice of hewing down a tree, dividing it into thirds, and then using one-third to cook their food, using one-third to provide heat, and having one-third fashioned into a “god” to whom they would bow in worship. The height of foolishness indeed! Darwinian evolution offers an “alternative” to God, no less stupid than idolatry.

Atheism is foolish because Science says so –

The Bible affirms that atheism is foolish, and science corroborates the Bible's claim. The anti-theists have deceived themselves into believing that science is the ultimate friend to their anti-theistic notions, when in actuality, science – true science, is an insurmountable foe to the atheist. Whether exploring the discipline of biology, paleontology, geology, or astronomy, the scientific evidence points toward an intelligent, omnipotent, omnibenevolent Creator. Neither will time, space or the author's limited expertise concerning the following subject matter permit an overly extensive and complicated layout of information. This is all right though, for neither an over-abundance of time, space or expertise is needed. This issue is really quiet simple. All that is needed are the bare facts and an honest mind.

Where *biology* is concerned, a host of scientists with integrity, and even the modern “father” of evolutionary theory have conceded the truth that the Law of Biogenesis presents an unanswerable problem for atheists. In his written contribution to the Preaching the Whole Counsel of God Lectures, Randy L. Mabe quotes, now deceased atheist, turned believer, Antony G. N. Flew, who affirmed, “Charles Darwin himself acknowledged that the process of evolution requires a creator to start the process.” Mabe goes on to rightfully state (borrowing an expression from Robert R. Taylor), “Evolution is impotent in dealing with how life arrived. [Evolutionists] talk glibly about “the survival of the fittest.” They need to address ARRIVAL before addressing SURVIVAL!”

Michael J. Behe, biochemist, author, and Professor of Biological Sciences at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, at the outset of his book, *Darwin's Black Box*, honestly attests,

Science has made enormous progress in understanding how the chemistry of life works, but the elegance and complexity of biological systems at the molecular level have paralyzed science's attempt to explain their origins. There has been virtually no attempt to account for the origin of specific, complex, biomolecular systems, much less any progress. Many scientists have gamely asserted that explanations are already in hand, or will be sooner or later, but no support for such assertions can be found in the professional science literature. More importantly, there are compelling reasons—based on the structure of the systems themselves—to think that a Darwinian explanation for the mechanisms of life will forever prove elusive.

The word “pasteurization” is, for the most part, a common household term today. Most Americans frequent their local grocery stores weekly (twice daily if you are like me and are still raising three growing boys). We have come to give no thought at all to the fact that we purchase gallons of Vitamin A&D homogenized, pasteurized milk. The term “pasteurized” derives from the name of scientist Louis Pasteur. Kyle Butt perhaps stated it best when he wrote, “[Louis Pasteur's] work dealt a crushing blow to the notion of spontaneous generation (the idea that life arises of its own from nonliving sources)” (*Science and the Bible*, 123). Since

the field of biological science has disproven the notion of spontaneous generation, then a supernatural Creator must account for the appearance of life forms, relegating atheism to the realm of foolishness!

Venturing into the field of *paleontology*, the branch of science concerned with fossilized animals and plants, science becomes no more favorable to atheism's desperate pleas. Were evolution (the only conceivable alternative to divine creation) a reality, then the fossil record would be replete with evidence of so-called "missing links" or intermediate creatures. As it stands, no such evidence exists. In fact, the whole body of proposed "proof" of evolution's intermediates has been exposed for the fraudulent hoaxes that they were. From paleoanthropologist Charles Dawson's *Pittdown Man*, and Henry Fairfield Osborn's *Nebraska Man*, to Donald Johanson's Lucy and Ernst Haeckel's recapitulation theory, each exhibit of "evidence" for evolution has been debunked and dismissed – by all except the foolish.

One commodity absolutely indispensable to atheistic evolution is millions upon millions of years of time. Unfortunately for the anti-theist, scientific evidence reveals that this plethora of time is simply unavailable. Numbered among the evidences that support the truth of a relatively young earth is the reality of polystrate fossils. Jeff Miller, in his *Reason & Revelation* article *21 Reasons to Believe the Earth is Young*, drawing from other scholarly sources writes,

Perhaps the most widely used argument for a millions-of-years-old Earth historically has been the rock layers of the geologic column. It would

take millions of years for the thousands of meters of material beneath us to accumulate and lithify—or so the argument goes. Is that true? A polystrate fossil is a single fossil that spans more than one geologic stratum. Many polystrate tree trunk fossils have been discovered, as well as a baleen whale, swamp plants called calamites, and catfish.”

Thus, the scientific field of geology lends no favor to the atheists’ argument either.

Finally, the realm of astronomy with its “Big Bang” and “Multiverse” theories, likewise, presents a major issue for atheists. Given that the universe did come into existence via a “big bang” resultant of an explosion of a single molecule multiplied millions of years ago (which theory this author rejects), the question remains: Where did the single molecule come from?

The multiverse notion theorizes that a universe such as ours that is equipped to sustain life would have had a greater chance of developing in a scenario where it was one of literally billions of other universes. This idea is as foolish as assuming that my having a billion pennies increases the chance of one of them evolving into an one hundred dollar bill! Besides the foolishness of that notion, the question remains: If our universe is just one of a collection of billions, where did the billions come from? Like the field of biology, the science of astronomy is reduced to a deafening silence regarding the origin of the material worlds.

Atheism is foolish because Philosophy says so –

Of the classical philosophical arguments that pertain to our present subject, three will be considered

very briefly. The rational, honest, and truly intellectual mind will conclude that atheism is an unreasonable, in fact, a foolish position given these three arguments.

The **Cosmological Argument** directs reasonable minds to the truth of a first cause. As has been observed in the previous sections of this study, neither Darwinism or the scientific fields of biology and astronomy can account for the presence of the initial material(s) from which our universe and the life that it contains sprang. The Cosmological Argument essentially states the philosophical truth that if anything exists, then that thing must exist as the result of an adequate cause independent of the item itself. Science (specifically the Second Law of Thermodynamics) has established the fact that matter is not eternal. If matter is not eternal, then it had a beginning. Since no thing comes from nothing, then there must be something (rather someone) responsible for the initiation of the universe and the life that it houses.

Secondly, the **Teleological Argument** affirms the simple truth that design implies a designer. No sensible person would deny this truth concerning even the most elementary designs. Simple ink pens, clocks, and paper airplanes could not possibly be the result of mere chance, but rather clearly point to a designer. How then can an intelligent human being be inclined to believe that the vast complexities of biological structures or the overwhelming intricacies of our wondrous universe are the product of mere chance rather than intelligent design?

This author could have wished, at least during my

four years of college, that such nonsense was reality! I was a Graphic Design major. If my designs, to be presented for a graded critique, could have just come about by chance so that I could have remained at the domino table, or in the gym playing basketball, or (even more importantly) gazing into the eyes of my beautiful soon-to-be bride, that would have been fine with me! Unfortunately, if there was to be a designed assignment for the critique, there would have to be a designer.

Lastly, let us consider the **Moral Argument**. In 1976, theistic philosopher Thomas B. Warren met atheistic philosopher Antony G. N. Flew in debate concerning the existence of God. Flew affirmed, "I know God does not exist," while Warren affirmed, "I know God does exist." The major of the multiple arguments that Warren presented in refutation of Flew's position and in defense of his own regarded divine moral law. Dr. Warren argued,

In connection with the work of the Nazis and the charges against them and their condemnation, [Dr. Flew] has admitted by implication that there is a higher law which transcends what each individual thinks. It even transcends what a whole nation thinks. It even transcends what a whole group of nations thinks. There is a higher law above mere human law, which can be only the law of God. (*The Warren-Flew Debate on the Existence of God*, 151)

Warren repeatedly emphasized that Flew ensnared himself in an inescapable contradiction by affirming that morality is merely determined by the opinions of men while also agreeing that the Nazis were guilty of

absolute, objective moral wrong. The Nazis certainly did not consider themselves guilty of wrong! If there is such a thing as objective moral wrong that transcends the opinions of human beings (and even one of the most renown atheist of his time admitted such), then there must be a God!

ATHEISM IS DANGEROUS

The Sweet Psalmist of Israel proceeds in the Fourteenth Psalm to affirm concerning the atheists, “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works...” (Psa. 14:1b). A painfully observable truth of atheism is the moral depravity that often accompanies a rejection of God, and the dismissal of behavioral accountability. In making his case for the Gentile necessity of the Gospel of Christ, the apostle Paul documents the soul jeopardizing moral decline that went hand-in-hand with their desertion of God. Having cited that the Gentiles foolishly failed to recognize God (Rom.1:21), and that they subsequently replaced Him with imaginary images (Rom. 1:23), the apostle then begins to catalogue the various forms of immoral behavior that followed. In Romans 1, at the top of the list of the nations’ abominable conduct is their involvement in homosexual sin, which the Bible describes as unclean (24a), dishonorable (24b), vile (26a), unnatural (26b), unseemly (27a), erroneous (27b), reprobate (28a), and unfitting (28b). Additionally, Paul itemizes every form of unethical activity from fornication and covetousness, to being devoid of natural affection and mercy (cf. Rom. 1:29-31).

A more modern account of action that attests to the dangers associated with atheism concerns the life of infamous serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. In his own words, Dahmer affirmed that his atheism greatly contributed to the heinous atrocities that he committed. In a jailhouse interview aired on the MSNBC television network in 2012, Dahmer revealed to reporter Stone Philips his rationale behind the seventeen monstrous murders of which he was convicted stating,

I always believed the theory of evolution as truth; that we all just came from the slime. When we, when we died, you know, that was it, there is nothing....If a person doesn't think there is a God to be accountable to, then, what's the point in trying to modify your behavior to keep it within acceptable ranges? That's how I thought anyway.
([youtube.com/watch?v=4MK9glxbxrk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MK9glxbxrk))

The truth of the matter does not get any more real than that. One of the most notorious murderers of all time admitted that his disbelief in God enabled him to harm others in ways that are too detestable to even think about for an extended length of time. (This author does recognize that Jeffrey Dahmer reportedly obeyed the Gospel of Christ prior to his death while incarcerated).

Secularists, such as Phil Zuckerman, deny the inseparable connection between atheism and dangerous behavior. He states in the article referred to earlier that “the fear that secularism is somehow dangerous to society is clearly unfounded.” The evidence shows otherwise. The truth of this matter is readily recognized by Robert Waggoner in his article, *The Existence of God*

published in the *Gospel Gleaner*. Waggoner states, "... what people believe about God is a determining factor in how people behave" (1). As Poythress proclaims, "It is important to understand that the brand of atheism that springs from Dawkin's beliefs is not indifferent and inactive...consequences necessarily flow from any philosophical perspective." He goes on to aver, "Ideas have teeth. They do not just sit out there apart from reality. We demonstrate our beliefs in how we behave."

In our postmodern society, we seem to have an affinity for operating outside of the boundaries of reality. Nevertheless, the truth recorded in the Fourteenth Psalm stands sure. Where atheism abounds, corrupt and abominable works are not far behind.

ATHEISM IS HOPELESS

After affirming the foolishness of atheism, and the dangerous behavior that accompanies it, David writes,

...There is none that doeth good. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Psa. 14:1a-3).

Interestingly, this is the Psalm that the apostle Paul quotes in presenting the disparaging truth that all men are under sin (Rom. 3:9-12). The deliberate atheism of the Gentiles and the inexcusable emulation of the Israelites resulted in a universal hopelessness. Such hopelessness will always be the dismal appendage of the atheistic position. In an article on the cover of

the September 2003 issue of **Reason & Revelation**, Thompson recalls reading a piece in *Time Magazine* entitled *Dying on Our Own Terms*. He recounts that the most shocking portion of the article was the pitiful statements of 72 year old terminally ill psychologist, Felice Gans, during her interview with **Time** staff writer, John Cloud. The statements were, “I spend part of every day mourning my own death,” and “Sometimes wish that I had a belief system.” The type of hopelessness that gives way to that sentiment simply does not have to exist. God is. God loves His creation. God has made provisions in Christ for the eternal salvation of humanity. The evidence verifies these truths. To believe otherwise is the epitome of foolishness, the fuel of perilousness, and the dread of hopelessness.

CONCLUSION

When men and women reject the foolishness of atheism, learn to detest the horrible behavior that it spawns, and come to embrace the logical truth of God’s existence, they are well on their way to coming to know the hope that is readily available to all obedient believers.

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The Young Earth

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In every time period, geographical location, and culture, the goal of evangelism is to translate the unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ into meaningful concepts that can be understood, accepted, and obeyed by a specific culture or group (Hesselgrave and Rommen, 2000, p. 1).

This process is most commonly referred to as contextualization. On the other hand, the process of syncretism is when the biblical truth is altered due to pressure from the culture to which it is being

communicated. The syncretized message is one that has forfeited truth and substituted in place of that truth concepts that are culturally acceptable and “meaningful,” but which lack a basis in truth and Scripture. Much syncretism has occurred due to the pressure and presence of atheistic evolution and modern “scientific” thinking in our secular, 21st-century American culture. This syncretism has manifested itself in numerous theories that compromise the Genesis account of Creation of which the most popular seems to be the Day-Age Theory.

THE AGE OF THE EARTH AND THE UNIVERSE

One of the core teachings of atheistic evolution is that the Universe is billions of years old. All of those involved in the discussion recognize that without such vast eons of time, the supposed naturalistic processes at play in the evolutionary scheme would not have time to accomplish their work (even though, we would contend, all the time one could imagine would be insufficient to accomplish the impossibilities associated with atheistic evolution). Atheist David Mills wrote:

Despite widely divergent viewpoints, creationists and evolutionary biologists agree on a crucial fact: Six-thousand years is insufficient time for evolution to have produced the complex lifeforms we observe on Earth today. *Homo sapiens* could evolve only if given hundreds of millions of years to accumulate selective advantages. A 6000-year-old Earth means therefore that Genesis and the Theory of Evolution are forever irreconcilable (2006, p. 137).

Mills suggests that those who adopt the Day-Age theory do so only in order to avoid being labeled as atheists, what he calls the “dreaded ‘A’ label.” While his equivocation of the concept of an old Earth with atheism is unfounded, he goes on to state that those who wish to force the Genesis text to accommodate an ancient Earth are involved in “a pompous intellectual charade” designed simply so they can “‘have it both ways’—imagining themselves to be both religious and scientific at the same time” (2006, p. 151).

Countless other atheistic and/or evolutionary scientists have written concerning the opposition between modern “science” and biblical teaching. [NOTE: The word “science” is in quotations, because what is often called “science” in the modern sense is actually evolutionary, assumption-based science that is not founded on fact, and what is routinely discounted as being unscientific is often much more rigorously verifiable than the modern idea of “science.” Thus, when most atheists/evolutionists speak of “science,” the meaning of “evolutionary or materialistic false science” should be understood.] Co-discoverer of the DNA double helix structure, Francis Crick, wrote:

I realized early on that it is detailed scientific knowledge which makes certain religious beliefs untenable. A knowledge of the true age of the earth and of the fossil record makes it impossible for any balanced intellect to believe in the literal truth of every part of the Bible in the way that fundamentalists do. And if some of the Bible is manifestly wrong, why should any of the rest of it be accepted automatically? (1988, p. 11).

In truth, Crick's and Mills' assessment that much of modern atheistic/evolutionary-based "science" is directly opposed to a straightforward reading of the biblical text is correct. That being the case, what would we expect to see if certain scholars wanted to "have it both ways" and appear both religious and scientific? We would expect to see a massive reinterpretation of key aspects of the biblical text, especially as it relates to God's creative activities. In addition, we would not be surprised if multiple ways of cramming billions of years into the text of Genesis were explored by different authors.

In truth, hosts of ways have been invented in an attempt to fit millions of years into the biblical text including the Gap Theory, Progressive Creationism, Modified Progressive Creationism, the Modified Gap Theory, the Non-world view, the Multiple Gap Theory, and the Framework Hypothesis (see Thompson, 2000, pp. 275-306). The fact that multiple ways are attempted to accommodate the billions of years advocated by modern "science" is a tell-tale sign that the deep time scenario did not derive from the Bible, and is only being forced into the text in an attempt to syncretize the Bible with modern "science." In order to see this trend of syncretism, let us consider the writing of David Snoke, an advocate of the Day-Age theory.

DAVID SNOKE AND THE DAY-AGE THEORY

David Snoke's book, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth*, published by Baker Books in 2006, provides an excellent example of an attempt to syncretize the

biblical account of Creation with the evolutionary-based scenario of an Earth measured in millions or billions of years. Snoke explains in his preface: “This book presents the case of a ‘day-age’ view that takes Genesis 1 as giving a real chronological sequence, but not necessarily of twenty-four-hour days” (2006, p. 9). Snoke’s primary contention is that the biblical account of Creation can legitimately be interpreted to allow for billions of years of Earth history. He believes that certain scientific evidences call for a reinterpretation of the days of Creation to allow the days to be unidentified ages of extended time.

The primary scientific evidences that he believes point toward the conclusion that the Earth is old are presented in chapter two of his book and include such concepts as distant starlight, geological layers, and tree ring dating methods (pp. 24-46). He contends that these scientific evidences for an old Earth have no other possible answer than “God made them look old.” And while he believes that God could do that, he does not believe that is what God did, and thus he maintains that we must interpret the biblical text to accommodate the billions of years that modern science supposes.

While Snoke is aware of the many highly qualified scientists who advocate a young Earth, and who believe the scientific evidence points to a young Earth, he believes these scientists are in error. He believes that since, by and large, these scientists have not been successful at being accepted in peer reviewed (read that as evolutionary-based) journals, and have attempted nonetheless to present their views to the general public,

they have bypassed the rules of modern science. He stated:

Young-earth creationists engage in scientific practices widely considered unethical by mainstream scientists. This sounds like quite an accusation, but I see it as intrinsic to the young-earth science movement. Young-earth creation scientists say that an enormous amount of modern science is wrong, either through a conspiracy or through shared beliefs that lead scientists to unconsciously suppress or alter data. There-fore, young-earth creation scientists must bypass the modern science establishment.... Most scientists feel that bypassing other scientists to market your scientific claims directly to the public is highly unethical, since the public is not qualified to evaluate scientific claims (pp. 187-188).

Snoke manifests his true feelings and his mode of operation in the above quote. He cannot bring himself to say that an “enormous amount of modern science is wrong.” One wonders why it would be difficult to say that. If the Bible is correct that Satan is the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), and he is the father of lies (John 8:44), and he has blinded those who do not believe, what better way to “blind“ people to the truth than by using the respected “scientific” avenues to propagate misinformation? In reality, many of those who suggest that the available scientific evidence points to a young Earth have not bypassed the scientific process. On the contrary, they have been excluded from the process by those who refuse to accept anything that allows for a straightforward reading of the Bible to be correct (see

Butt, 2008). Credentialed scientists such as Henry Morris have critically assessed the scientific evidence and have demonstrated that it favors a young Earth (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961). Others such as John D. Morris and Don DeYoung have done the same (Morris, 1994; DeYoung, 2005). In fact, John Ashton edited the book, *In Six Days*, in which 50 credentialed scientists give their reasons for believing in a Creation that happened in six, literal days (Ashton, 2000). Additionally, Kurt P. Wise, who earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in paleontology from Harvard University while studying under Stephen Jay Gould, maintains that the scientific and biblical evidence converge to show that the Earth's age is measured in thousands of years, not billions (2002).

The scientific case for an old Earth is not nearly as convincing as Snoke suggests. It is fraught with error. But it is the prevailing idea maintained by the majority of scientists. That is why, it seems, that Snoke and other old-Earth advocates feel the burden to conform to it. In his attempt to justify the avenue he has taken, Snoke appeals to the concept of contextualization (though he does not call it that). He states:

As hard as it may be, we must work to convince the scientific world, not bypass it. This means we must take the time to learn the basic rules of the secular scientific world, even while we question the unproven assumptions we hear. Many missions experts affirm that to impact a culture, the church must address the top elements of society, lest it be permanently marginalized (p. 191).

Snoke, in essence, is contending that if we write off a majority of the “evidences” for an old Earth as faulty, then the bulk of the scientific community is not going to listen to what we say. In order to gain an audience with the “top elements of society” we must work within the “rules” of the “secular scientific world.” It is unfortunate that in his attempt to keep Christianity from being “marginalized” he has failed to correctly identify the “unproven assumptions” that the evolutionary-based scientific community is foisting on the public.

SNOKE’S “BIBLICAL CASE

Snoke contends that his understanding of the Bible is not driven by his scientific observations, but is somewhat based upon them. He admits that his “experience in science has affected” his interpretation of the Bible, and he says, “To put it another way, **it is very improbable that I ever would have come up with the view that the earth is millions of years old if I had never studied science**” (p. 11, emp. added). Even though Snoke contends that his mode of operation in this instance is justified, it seems evident that Snoke allowed his (faulty) understanding of modern science to dictate his interpretation of the Bible.

He further suggests that while all scientific observation is apt to change or be adjusted by new observations, “theological systems are provisional works of human beings, too.... While we must not take lightly the Bible interpretation of faithful scholars of the past, we can also hope that new generations have something to add as well” (2006, pp. 22-23). What

Snoke, as a representative of the “new generation” adds, unfortunately, is a biblical interpretation that forfeits much of its truth because it is driven by modern evolutionary science.

The Day-Age theory advocated by Snoke and a host of others suggests that the days of Creation in Genesis one were not 24-hour periods, but were long, extended periods that would have taken millions or billions of years to complete. Much of the “biblical” case for this theory stems from the idea that the Hebrew word *yom*, which is translated as “day” in Genesis one and two, can have various meanings. One of those meanings is “an unidentified period of time,” as in the phrase “the day of the Lord.” In this phrase, “day” does not connote an exact 24-hour timeframe. Those who advocate the Day-Age theory maintain that such a usage could also extend to the days of Creation in Genesis one. After Weston Fields cited a quote from Wilbur Smith, who advocated the Day-Age Theory, Fields said about Smith’s statement: “Most importantly, the primary argument for the Day-Age Theory is shown to be based merely on the fact that the word ‘day’ can (not must!) be used either literally or figuratively in the Bible, the argument most commonly used by those defending this position” (1976, p. 169, italics in orig.).

The problem with attempting to force the days of Creation in Genesis one to mean anything other than literal, 24-hour days is that the context simply does not allow for it. First, the word *yom*, when used with numeric adjectives such as one, two, three, etc. always means a literal 24-hour day in non-prophetic biblical

literature. Arthur Custance, an old-Earth proponent of the Gap theory, in critiquing the Day-Age theory, alluded to the fact that the Hebrew word *yom*, translated “day” in Genesis one always refers to a literal 24-hour period when coupled with numeric adjectives such as those that are used in Genesis 1:5,8,13, etc. (1977, p. 100). Snoke actually conceded: “It is true that **we can find no other passage in Scripture in which days are numbered and have a generic sense**” (2006, p. 145, emp. added). But he then attempted to show why Genesis one might be the only instance in all of Scripture in which this is the case. Needless to say, when a novel rendering of a recognized literary construction is appealed to in order to justify a belief that stems, not from the text, but from a view of modern “scientific” observation, the special pleading required is immediately suspect.

In addition to the fact that the word *yom* is coupled with numeric adjectives, other contextual factors verify that the word means a literal, 24-hour day. Thompson provides an excellent list of at least nine reasons why the days of Genesis one must logically be viewed as literal, 24-hour periods (2000, pp. 181-211). Custance emphatically argued that the context demands a literal reading for the word “day.” He stated: “The fact is that the Hebrew language just does not have any other way of expressing the exact idea of a true day!” (1977, p. 100). Fields emphatically states: “It is our conclusion, therefore, that the Day-Age Theory is impossible. It is grammatically and exegetically preposterous. Its only reason for existence is its allowance for the *time* needed by evolutionary geology and biology” (1976, p. 178,

italics in orig.). Chaffey and Lisle correctly conclude: “In other words, according to old-earthers, it seems that the general rules of interpretation just do not apply to Genesis. Instead, it should be treated differently than any other book” (2008, p. 31).

AN IRRELEVANT ISSUE

Snoke’s biblical case for an old Earth hinges on novel interpretations and reading into the text concepts that are not there rather than inferring ideas from the biblical text that the author intended. For instance, one of his contentions is that a major obstacle to believing in an old Earth is the concept of animal death before the fall. He believes that if he can show that animals died before Adam and Eve sinned, then that will help convince many young Earth creationists that he is right about an old Earth. He argues that concepts such as darkness and the sea indicate danger, and their presence in the creation account insinuate that animals could die outside of the Garden of Eden. He writes: “For the ancient Hebrew, however, the sea was a place of danger. Just as in the darkness, where dangerous animals lurk out of sight, ready to jump out, in the sea dangerous monsters lurk out of sight below the surface ready to jump up” (p. 59). He builds on this theme by connecting God’s power with God’s wrath, and stating that it is difficult in Scripture to “make a distinction between the demonstration of God’s power and the demonstration of his wrath” (p. 93).

His analysis is faulty for a number of reasons. He spends over 50 pages and two major chapters dealing

with animal death before the Fall, because, in his opinion, “this is the issue that leads to objections to an old Earth” (p. 99, italics in orig.). In reality, however, the issue of Earth’s age has nothing to do with the concept of animal death before the Fall. It is just as easy to believe in a young Earth and maintain that animals died before the Fall as it is to believe in a young Earth while believing that there was no animal death before the Fall. The issue of whether or not there was animal death before the Fall is outside the purview of this article (see Thompson, 2001), and it is irrelevant to the age of the Earth and to the definition of the word “day” in Genesis one.

Furthermore, not only is his connection of animal death to the age of the Earth exaggerated, his strained exegesis of elements—such as the sea and darkness indicating danger, and God’s power being virtually equivalent to His wrath—is equally exaggerated and shows evident signs of special pleading. The reason the days in Genesis one are viewed as literal, 24-hour days is based on a proper understanding of the Hebrew word for *yom* in Genesis one; and the unity of the rest of the Scriptures flesh out a literal meaning of the word (such as Exo. 20:11). The belief in a young Earth may be connected in some literature with the concept of animal death, but **nothing in Scripture mandates this connection**, and one does not stand or fall with the other.

Snoke further weakens his case when he attempts to tie the days of Creation with the events that were seen by John in the book of Revelation. He wrote: “The seven seals, one may argue, themselves come as the sevenfold completion of the Sabbath day of creation. Thus the

events of the seven seals represent the ‘beginning of the birth pangs’ mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:4-8” (p. 110). He then concluded: “If we take seriously the sequences of Revelation as representing a real chronology of events over a long period of time, then it is natural to see a parallel with the sequence of Genesis one representing a real chronology over a long period of time” (p. 110). Notice how he stretches to try to connect Genesis one to the entire book of Revelation. This stretch is impossible to prove and is dubious due to the fact that Genesis and Revelation are not even the same genre of literature. While Genesis is historic narrative, Revelation is apocalyptic literature.

It is often the case that those who are attempting to force outside information into the biblical text resort to the book of Revelation and contend that difficult-to-understand passages in that book lend credence to their novel interpretation. We must always remember, however, that the basic rule of good Bible interpretation is to assess the less difficult passages first and not to allow more difficult passages to obscure the clear meaning of the less difficult ones. In an attempt to make Genesis one and two look like difficult passages, Snoke connects them to Revelation and tries to let passages of Revelation that are more difficult to understand reinterpret the clear historic narrative of Genesis. Such is not the way to engage in proper Bible interpretation.

AN ADDITIONAL PROBLEM

It is often the case that those who compromise the truth of the creation account are forced to compromise

other aspects of the biblical text as well. One of the primary biblical events where such compromises are seen is the biblical flood of Noah. Due to their adherence to such evolutionarily-based concepts as uniformitarianism, many old-Earth advocates feel that a global flood would have been “scientifically” impossible, and they feel that adequate physical evidence is not available to justify a world-wide flood. As Snoke stated: “One thing I could not do, without being utterly dishonest in regard to my scientific experience, would be to adopt the view of Henry Morris and some other flood geologists, that science tells us that the earth appears to have had a global, six-mile-deep flood. It does not” (p. 175, italics in orig.). [NOTE: Snoke inserts a strawman argument into the above quote, suggesting that flood geologists must advocate a “six-mile deep” flood. That is based on his uniformitarian assumption that the topography of the Earth must have been the same during the Flood as it is now. Such an assumption should not be granted. In fact, there seems to be a biblical indication that the height of mountains and the depth of oceanic trenches was drastically altered during or following the Flood (Psa. 104:8).] Because of these, and other reasons, old Earth advocates often reinterpret the Genesis account in a way that allows for a local flood instead of one that covered the entire globe.

Snoke laid out his approach clearly when he declared: “The scientific data cause us to take a second look at the traditional interpretation, because things appear inconsistent with flood geology” (p. 174). This statement is another indication of why he has

syncretized many aspects of the Bible. He consistently gives precedence to the “scientific” evidence, and uses it to “reinterpret” the biblical text. His teachings (and all other old Earth ideas) are based primarily, not on what the Bible says, but on what modern “science” says, and how modern scientific discoveries can be squeezed into the biblical text. This approach is flawed, not only because it gives the biblical text a secondary status compared to modern evolutionary science, but also because it selectively chooses those “scientific” evidences that purportedly prove an old Earth. The approach discounts the legitimate scientific evidences that point to a young Earth and the global Flood (see Morris and Austin, 2003; Whitcomb and Morris, 1961). Furthermore, modern “scientific” ideas change rapidly, and many of these ideas that are used today to “reinterpret” the biblical text will be defunct tomorrow.

Relying, then, not on a proper understanding of the biblical text, but on an adherence to modern “science,” Snoke and others insist that the flood of Noah was a local event that did not cover the entire globe. Arthur Custance, the old-Earth advocate of the Gap Theory, gives a hint as to his mode of biblical interpretation, when he wrote: “Actually, I would say personally that anyone who takes the text wholly seriously will be forced to conclude that the event had a quite limited magnitude in terms of depth of water, simply because the run-off was slow. This run-off can be shown from the figures in the text to have been only a few inches per day!” (1979, p. 25, *italics in orig.*).

Notice the built-in assumptions that undergird

Custance's conclusion. He is assuming that the processes we see today are the same ones that were at work during the Flood. And he is assuming that we can understand Earth's topography during the Flood based on our current knowledge of its topography. In essence, Custance is using a uniformitarian assumption that things are continuing now as they did in the past. While he insists in other places that he is not discounting all miraculous events during the Flood, he (like Snoke and others) relies quite heavily on an application of uniformitarian processes to events surrounding the flood. Notice, also, that he believes the text of Genesis should be understood in light of what he thinks he knows scientifically about water run-off rates. Could it be, however, that there are certain aspects of water run-off that he does not fully understand and that would not call for the flood to be "quite limited" in magnitude? Could it be that the topography of the Earth was vastly different from what we see today? Or is it possible that the complete saturation of the entire Earth slowed the run-off process? Any number of possibilities could be supplied as to why run-off was slow that would not require us to conclude that the flood was a local event. Yet Custance appeals to his knowledge of water run-off rates, and believes that anyone who wants to take the text of Genesis seriously must factor them into his understanding of the text.

By minimalizing the flood to that of a local catastrophe and not a global phenomenon, many old-Earth advocates have put their "scientific" knowledge of evolutionary-based geology and uniformitarianism in

front of an accurate understanding and interpretation of the text of Genesis. The method of interpretation that allows them to discount the week of Creation as being composed of literal, 24-hour days that occurred a few thousand years ago, is the same mode of interpretation that they use to discount the global flood. That is, they have relied on **current assumptions** by modern evolutionary and uniformitarian science to lead their biblical interpretation around by the nose.

Snoke understands that many will see his reinterpretation of the days of Genesis one and of the global flood as a sell out. In an effort to soften the blow of this accusation, Snoke stated: “I can already hear people saying, ‘Here we go down the slippery slope. First he wants to “explain away” the creation week, now he wants to “explain away” the flood, then what?’” (p. 158). He knows that many conservative scholars, who see such tactics as Snoke uses, often conclude that those interpretative devices allow for the faulty biblical interpretations in other places.

While Snoke insists that he is not trying to negate all the miracles in the Bible, he fails to realize that his interpretative method has already compromised two of the most important and most physically impacting miracles in the Universe’s history: Creation and the Flood. With these two miracles “out of the way,” the door is opened for all types of reinterpretations, and many of the New Testament warnings and teachings are rendered meaningless. For instance, in 2 Peter 3:5-6, we read: “For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing

out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.” About this verse, Snoke wrote: “The New Testament references to this passage also do not specify the size of the flood. Peter says that the kosmos was destroyed (2 Pet. 3:6), a word that typically refers to political order (hence, ‘cosmopolitan’)” (p. 169). His conclusion concerning the word kosmos is incorrect. The word kosmos does not “typically” refer to political order. In fact, that use of the word is less than typical when compared with the typical uses of it (Lyons, 2007). In one of the most respected Greek lexicons available, the authors give for the meanings of the word: “the orderly Universe...the world as the earth, the planet upon which we live...the world as the habitation of mankind...earth, world in contrast to heaven” (Bauer, et al., 1979, pp. 445-447). Each of these meanings comes before the meaning of kosmos referring to mankind or the political order. In addition, the inspired writer linked the world with the concepts of “the heavens and the Earth;” clearly referring to the physical realms of the terrestrial globe and what surrounds it.

CONCLUSION

The age of the Earth is not a peripheral issue that is irrelevant to one’s understanding of the Bible. As has rightly been concluded, even by those who adopt an old-Earth approach: “The debate over the age of the earth is not just an academic exercise in dating but a very lively debate over the very core themes of the Bible, which relate to our view of all life” (Snoke, 2006, p.

194). The age of the Earth, then, often becomes a test as to how a person will approach the entirety of the biblical text. Those who choose to look to culture and modern “science” for the answers find themselves reinterpreting the biblical text to fit the modern notions of the evolutionary, uniformitarian scientific community. Once they veer from an accurate understanding of Genesis one and two, they are forced to do the same with the global Flood, and numerous other ideas found in the Bible.

A proper understanding of modern science, however, shows that there is no conflict with what we know to be fact and a straightforward reading of Genesis one and two as a historical narrative that describes the Creation of the entire Universe in six literal, 24-hour days only a few thousand years ago. In fact, a host of credentialed scientists have shown that the actual facts we possess about the physical Universe point to a young Earth and militate against an old-Earth interpretation. Those who have chosen to adopt old-Earth views have done so in a spirit of syncretism, and have diluted the truth and power of the biblical text. It is our hope that they will see the error into which they have been led and into which they have led others, and turn from such compromising practices.

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All Lives Matter: Racism

Glenn Hitchcock



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What is the origin of racism? What should be a Christian's view toward racism? Many nations and societies have been crippled from within because of the insidiousness of racism. Racism can limit the spread of the gospel throughout the world in contradiction of the charge Jesus gave His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

The Great Commission is God's guaranteed promise to the world that all lives matter, and each soul is of supreme value (Mat.16:26). Racism therefore has no place in the advancement of men, nations or churches.

Robert Barker suggest three words to paint a clearer understanding of our topic. The first word is the generic word **racism**. It is the stereotyping and generalizing about people, usually negatively, because of their race, commonly a basis of discrimination against members of racial groups. Racism is an ideology that a group's unchangeable (racial) physical characteristics are linked in a direct causal way to psychological, intellectual, or behavioral traits, and these distinguish superior and inferior groups (Barker, 397). The second word, **institutional racism**, involving those policies, practices, or procedures embedded in bureaucratic structures that systematically lead to unequal outcomes for people of color. Institutional racism can also be connoted as **systemic racism** (Barker 244). Last, **individual racism**. It expresses the negative attitudes one person has about all members of a racial or ethnic group, often resulting in overt acts such as name-calling, social exclusion, or violence (Barker 239). By drawing on the combined definitions of racism, institutional racism and individual racism, three undeniable facts may be deduced. Fact one, racism is stereotyping or labeling. It originates in an uneducated and an adversely influenced mind. Fact two, racism often leads to systemic exclusion. From mental to active execution of policies, people are targeted as victims. Example from history include the policy of Jim Crow, poll taxes, the Jewish Holocaust and the policy of

Apartheid. Fact three, racism once advanced culminates in social exclusion and discrimination. So, whether in thought or action racism has no place in the promotion of goodwill or in glorifying the Heavenly Father.

Since racism did not originate with God how does Deity regard this matter? The inspired words of the apostle Peter give a clear answer:

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him (Acts 10:34-35).

What should be the view of Christians and can it be any different than God's view? James emphatically writes, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (Jam. 2:1). James 2 condemns behavior towards people based on who or what those individuals are. Christians must not treat some individuals differently from others simply because they are richer, poorer, well-dressed, poorly dressed, friend or foe. Racism, favoritism, discrimination, respect of persons doesn't harmonize with the faithful Christian. The consequences are clearly revealed from God, "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jam. 2:9).

The sickness of racial division in our society is not primarily social or political, but rather spiritual in nature. The politically incorrect church of Christ is erected as a bastion against all ungodly behaviors and lifestyles among men. Recognizing that all lives matter to God and His people, it is the awesome task of the church to illuminate the victorious pathway for uniting

all men everywhere (Eph. 3:8-11). Our study involves a threefold analogy for confronting and conquering racism. First, the importance of detecting the villain who perpetuates racism. Second, dissecting the victims of racism. Third, delineating the victory over racism.

DETECTING THE VILLAIN

Originating with Satan, the effort to inject the lie of racism into the minds of the masses is clearly demonstrated as he is the father of lies.

You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44).

It is when one adheres to the fallacy of racism and mentally allows it to fester unchecked, the conversion process (stereotyping, systemic and social exclusion) is completed. James admonished Christians to listen and render a response to the glory of God and not man.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (Jam. 1:17-20).

A casual observation of our world demonstrates the power of Satan acting through his villains as they

stoke messages of fear in the name of racism. The villain politics to dispossess people of power to think for themselves and thus renders them helpless and dependent. The villain fabricates systemic racism by alleging flawed causes without verification of evidence. Examples of systemic race-baiting can include fear the police, the judicial system, or a certain political affiliation. The weapon of falsehood, fear and promises of protection are the villain's tools of seduction.

How often have we encountered the activist groups in this country decrying police brutality? Police brutality is alleged as a systemic form of racism in this country, especially popularized by "Black Lives Matter." By promoting fear of law enforcement this group, as well as others, have alleged police brutality in the shooting of unarmed blacks. Larry Elder, a conservative talk show host, wrote a column in response to allegations of racism, systemic racism and police brutality that were raised by former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick:

When black Harvard economist Roland Fryer conducted a 2016 study of police use of force, he expected to find widespread evidence of police officers disproportionately using deadly force against blacks. Instead, he found the opposite. Police, he concluded, were *more* hesitant to use deadly force against blacks than against whites. 'It is,' he admitted, 'the most surprising result of my career.' This tracks another study published in 2014 by researchers at Washington State University, who reached the same conclusion, finding 'there was significant bias *favoring* (emphasis added) blacks where decisions to shoot were concerned" (Elder 1).

In response to these allegations let us raise one question. Is police brutality present in our society? Yes. Let's raise another question, is police brutality a form of systemic racism in our country? No. The very idea that a racist white cop shooting unarmed black people as a peril to black people is statistically a villainous myth!

According to the Manhattan Institute's Heather Mac Donald: In 2016, the police fatally shot 233 blacks, the vast majority armed and dangerous, according to The Washington Post. The paper categorized only 16 black male victims of police shootings as 'unarmed.' That classification masks assaults against officers and violent resistance to arrest. Contrary to the Black Lives Matter narrative, the police have much more to fear from black males than black males have to fear from the police. ... Black males have made up 42 percent of all cop-killers over the last decade, though they are only 6 percent of the population (Elder 1-2).

If you are a minority in this country, you must not subscribe to your emotions and demonstrate blind trust in political parties or traditions! You must debate your cause objectively (Pro. 25:9) and resist the racist villain: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7). The villain seems to thrive on a racist agenda that spins systemic racism as a major problem in America. Our response - provide the data! A fitting description of this villain is described in Jude:

These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words

which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit (Jude 1:16-19).

DISSECTING THE VICTIMS

All lives need to remember, no one can make you inferior without your permission. Typically, disenfranchised people regardless of color, are ripe for victimization. When bad things occur, people can be conditioned to assume the victim's role. The concept of victimization, where the villain uses the rhetoric of fear (racism), to strip people of power, autonomy and independence. At this point the victim finds it easy to blame others (like the government, or God) for his misfortune. Empowerment to overcome through the power of hard work and trust in the Almighty is often not a part of the intervention, as it should be (1 Tim. 5:8; Mat. 6:25-33).

William J. Wilson puts forth a forceful thesis that there is a widening gap in Black America:

Middle-class blacks (or those who have crossed the threshold from poverty to affluence or often align themselves more with those they seek to emulate than those whose racial identity they share. The black poor are left behind to find for themselves or to become putative wards of the welfare state. While black consciousness may help them, black separatist ideas may only add to the misery of their plight. They need others who share their other identity the identity of the 'have-nothings' (Wilson 56).

The victim is unable to think or reason for themselves due to learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is a pattern of behavior in which the individual responds passively to risks of harm. The person may behave without obvious symptoms in every other way but has come to believe there is nothing that can be done and that no effective help is available. Instead of thinking for himself, the victim surrenders to the Satanic villain. The victim is pounced with the rhetoric of racist fear and thus becomes a pawn rather than a person. Recall the words of Peter: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

The greatest threat to the spiritual security and unity of the masses is ignorance. The words of the prophet are still ringing true: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos. 4:6). God help us to stop subscribing to our emotions apart from objective truth (John 8:32). An axiomatic truth is God cares for all lives and all lives will endure bad things (including racism) but rather than assuming the victim’s role act to become a victor! God’s Word is our roadmap to victory, let’s follow it (Heb. 4:12).

DELINEATING THE VICTORY

While evidence of racism exists in our world, systemic racism is no longer a major problem holding any people back in this country. Research of the

statistical data has proven this. This is not to say that race is no longer significant or the racial barriers between blacks and whites have been eliminated. William Wilson states; “Comparing the contemporary situation of African Americans to their situation in the past, the diverging experiences of blacks along class lines indicate that race is no longer the primary determinant of life chances for blacks in the way it had been historically” (Wilson 57). Isolated acts of personal racism must not be exploited by the vocal minority to promote racial tensions. When this does occur Christians must lead the way by example of being impartial and by action in pointing people to an impartial church where all lives matter and have value!

It may not be politically correct, but God has made it perfectly clear that membership in the body of Christ is the spiritual clue to racism. Jesus Christ enshrined in the hearts of men is the only solution to racism and human strife. “That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph. 1:10). God’s commission to save all races (Mat. 28:19-20) will bring all obedient souls into His church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13). Paul describes this unifying action as the wisdom of God:

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things

through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

David R. Shannon in commenting on the wisdom of God stated; How do we handle racism?

Allow God's wisdom and eternal purpose for the unity of all believers to prove to any human or celestial being that be watching the church can overcome all racism! We see color of skin and various ethnicities, but we genuinely love all because our God's eternal purpose is wrapped up in it (Shannon 266).

The church of Christ is God's answer to Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17: 20-21).

The church that Jesus established in Acts chapter 2 represents a victorious picture of unity. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 are texts that demonstrate the harmonious unity of the Lord's church. 1 Corinthians 12 will be analyzed to deduce how Christ maintains impartiality and unity by three unique laws. Whenever these laws are ignored disunity ensues, but if carefully observed, racism and other problems can forever be eradicated.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

We close our study by examining the laws to a victorious unity within the church of Christ. The law of placement, the law of purpose and the law of protection.

THE LAW OF PLACEMENT

The first law is observed upon entrance through baptism into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It is God's good pleasure to add obedient members into His body. "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Cor. 12:18). On the day of Pentecost, the law of placement was at work, "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Every member of the human family is invited to convert into God's family through obedience of the gospel (Acts 2:38-47). Obedience to the gospel initiates placement by the Lord, and not man, into the church. Accordingly, every member must understand his place in the church. The devil would like to sniff out this important act (John 10:10), but Jesus places us in the position to enjoy an abundant life.

Christians have a deep and abiding sense of belonging. Why? Because fellowship and forgiveness along with all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The significance of the law of placement demonstrates God's great and impartial love for all members placed in His body. God used wisdom in designing the church as He did. Because one man meets the qualifications to become an elder, does not mean he has any reason to think he is more important and valuable than someone without those qualifications. The importance of each

member finding their place in the body is that the Head may be glorified (1 Cor. 6:20; Col. 1:18). Have you found your place in His body?

THE LAW OF PURPOSE

If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,' is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling (1 Cor. 12:15-17)?

The law of purpose clearly highlights God's expectation for all members of His body to function according to their purpose. In glorifying God, every member has a purpose and is dependent on other members to maintain unity.

David Lipscomb commented, God has put the members of the body in such relation to each other that the stronger and the more beautiful are compelled, for their own good and indeed for their existence, to defend and care for, and thus to honor, the weaker members (Lipscomb 188-89).

Many congregations have divided due to disobedience to the law of purpose. By not assuming their proper place in the body and neglecting their purpose to glorify the Head, they create division to the cause of Christ. Recall Diotrephes:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to

mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (3 John 1:9-10).

Placement and purpose in the church of Christ, when confronted with selfish partiality must be confronted or division will ensue. When division commences, the law of protection must be observed. Every member has a purpose in the body and if you are unsure of your purpose, I beseech you to speak to your elders or minister for assistance – be a victor rather than a victim!

THE LAW OF PROTECTION

No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12:22-27).

The law of protection esteems all members equally. From the highly visible members to the almost invisible members, who may labor in humble quietness and yet, all are extremely valuable. At the heart of the law of

protection is member dependency where members have the same care one for another. This same care for one another is not based on physical attributes, but according to genuine need. Remember, every member has a place in the body and every member has a purpose in the body. God's law of protection ensures love and genuine care that validates every member and thus, reducing divisive efforts to divide the body (1 Cor. 12:25). The law of protection concerns spiritual maturity and discipline among all members in fostering the fellowship of unity.

Bob Winton stated:

The members of the physical body are so united in common purpose and concern, that if the toe is injured, the hand rushes aid to relieve the pain, while the mouth announces the tragedy to the world! This is the degree of unity and concern that Christians must have in protecting and providing for each other (Winton 212).

Why? Because regardless of person, pigmentation, position or purse, all lives matter to God and the people of God. Let not racism be named among God's members! We are victorious through Jesus Christ. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

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God Is The Audience: Worship Is About Pleasing God

Sean Embree



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We swallowed the lie, beheld the fruit, savored the sin, and died — all because of the desire to take God’s place.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Gen. 3:1-6; all scripture references are from the New King James Version, unless cited otherwise).

Satan said, “you will be like God.” It was not entirely untrue; mankind did, in some way, become like God.

Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever— therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken (Gen. 3:22-23).

But, did Eve really achieve the “desirable” result she envisioned in this wisdom? On the contrary, we see words like “afraid” (Gen. 3:10), “deceived” (Gen. 3:13), “sorrow” and “pain” (Gen. 3:16), “cursed” (Gen. 3:17), and the promise of death (Gen. 3:19). Becoming like God did not draw her, nor her husband Adam, closer to God. It pushed them farther away from Him. The fellowship they enjoyed with God in the garden by being in His presence (Gen. 3:8) was ruined — no more walking with God in the garden; no more garden at all. The open eyes that Satan promised in Genesis 3:5 did not bring enlightenment, it brought darkness. And they were ashamed by what they saw (Gen. 3:7; Gen. 2:25).

In 1 John 2:16, we have the three key mechanisms that Satan uses to tempt us: “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.” Eve “saw that the tree was good for food” (“the lust of the flesh”), she saw “that it was pleasant to the eyes” (“the lust of the eyes”), and she saw that it was “a tree desirable to make one wise” (“the pride of life”). Part of Satan’s appeal was to Eve’s pride — “you will be like God!”

It is possible that Satan first succumbed to the same prideful temptation. In the garden, the curse the serpent

sustained after deceiving Eve may be indicative of Satan's pride. "A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Pro. 29:23). "So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, You are cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life'" (Gen. 3:14). It does not get much lower than the ground, does it? In the example of Nebuchadnezzar, we may see the symbolism that was intended in the curse of the serpent. He pridefully exalted himself and the Lord brought him down to earth, literally:

The king spoke, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?' While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws (Dan. 4:30-33).

At least Nebuchadnezzar still had legs to stand on! However, for Satan, the serpent's curse was only symbolic — Satan was not trapped in the serpent's body and could, thereafter, still walk (see Job 1:7; Job 2:2; 1 Pet. 5:8). The real curse was worse than eating dirt. While still using the imagery of the snake, we move past the symbolic snake physiology and

onto the heart of the matter, the enmity between Satan and God. We learn that the real curse was being crushed under the foot of Jesus. God said, “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15). If we are to take this in the same vein of being an indictment against his sinful ego, then we may think of it this way: having the most exalted part of his body, the head, crushed under the most unworthy part of his enemy’s body, the foot — a metaphor describing that Satan would be destroyed in the most humiliating (i.e. humbling) way. Satan wanted to humiliate the Lord — it is seen in the many ways he tempted Israel to sin against Him, culminating in the cross (see John 13:2). Now, imagine Satan attempting to make a public spectacle of the Lord’s defeat by lifting Him up on a cross only to have the Lord make a public spectacle of Satan’s defeat by the very same cross:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, **He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it** (Col. 2:13-15, emp added).

Is this not the imagery in the curse? The very same moment Jesus stepped on Satan’s head, both Jesus’ feet would be bruised and Satan’s head would be crushed. That moment was the cross. Yes, the cross was humiliating; Jesus despised the “shame” of the cross (Heb. 12:2). But the shame of the cross was only a bruise compared to the shame Satan would

suffer by the same cross. The cross was Satan's megaphone to declare his victory, and Jesus used that same megaphone to steal victory from him: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die" (John 12:31-33).

It is worth making clear that Jesus' victory over Satan would be complete. God said: "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). The Hebrew word "bruise" can also mean "crush" (*Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Strong's no. 7779). In light of Hebrews 2:14 ("that through death He might destroy him") and Romans 16:20 ("And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet"), Jesus' foot was bruised, but Satan's head was dealt a crushing and fatal blow. On this note, Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall." Satan would certainly be destroyed and what "goes before destruction?" In Satan's case, pride is a suspect. Did Satan desire to be in God's place, or to "be like God" (Gen. 3:5)? In Satan's temptation of Jesus, what did he ask in return for giving Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory?"

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship

the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'
(Mat. 4:8-10).

If there is any indication in Satan's temptation, Satan **did** want to be like God. Eve wanted the wisdom that belonged to God; Satan wanted the worship that belonged to God. But to have the Lord fall down and worship him would do more than take the worship that belonged to God, it would be to take God's place. Perhaps Satan fulfilled his dream elsewhere — he has his own angels: "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'" (Mat. 25:41). Do these angels worship him like God's angels worship Him (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 7:11)? I do not know. There is a sense in which he has fulfilled his dream in the world; although they may not physically bow down and worship him directly, he has their allegiance as their "prince" and "ruler" (Eph. 2:2; John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11), he has their heart as their "father" (John 8:42-44; cf. Mat. 13:38), and he takes their worship away from God, placing it on all manner of ungodly things for his own pleasure (Exo. 20:3-5; Deu. 4:19; Mat. 17:4-5; Col. 2:18; Col. 3:5). Consider that all of these labels that apply to Satan have counterparts in God: The Prince, the Ruler, the Father (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; 1 Chr. 17:11-14). Is this an indication of Satan's desire to be like God? The word that both Satan and Jesus use for "worship" in Matthew 4:8-10 (and the word that Jesus uses seven times in John 4:21-24) is "*proskuneo*" and can be defined as:

...to express by attitude and possibly by position one's allegiance to and regard for deity — 'to prostrate oneself in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship' (Louw & Nida, pg. 540)

from 4314 [pros = toward] and a probable derivative of 2965 [kuon = dog] (meaning to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand); to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore): — worship (*Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, Strong's no. 4352)

While I do not believe that worship can only be an attitude, the inward attitude of reverence (or lack of it) shapes the outward expression of reverence (John 4:23-24). For example, anything we put in God's place we call an "idol," without literally bowing down (singing to it, etc.). The world reveres and **honors** Satan as their god. Perhaps there is a sense in which any worship directed away from God is directed at Satan (see in Rev. 2:9, Rev. 3:9: the "synagogue of Satan;" cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Mat. 15:7-9 and see Rev. 12:9, Rev. 13:4). But if Satan fulfilled his dream, he also fulfilled his nightmare, "everlasting fire" (Mat. 25:41). If there is anything we learn in the garden, it is that desiring to be in God's place removes us from God's place. Adam and Eve were kicked out of God's place, the garden. Satan was kicked out of God's place, Heaven. Jesus said "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). We can be sure, there is no paradise at the end of the path of the prideful.

AT THE INTERSECTION OF PRIDE AND PRIASE

What the Devil started in the garden, or before, has not changed much, has it? The fruit still looks desirable — we still desire to be like God, not in emulation, but in usurpation. Sometimes this manifests itself in one very devilish way: as Satan said to Christ, "All these things I will

give You if You will fall down and worship me” — we would give anything to trade places with God to be the center of praise (Mat. 4:9). But pride of this sort does not always manifest itself so garishly. How arrogant to march up the mountain and tempt the Lord to “fall down and worship” you! Sure, we may never be so bold as to demand God’s worship, but pride takes various forms and intersects with worship in various ways — none of them praiseworthy.

PRETENTIOUS PRIDE

Sometimes when pride intersects with worship we find that worship is directed toward self, similar to Satan’s objective in tempting Jesus, yet different in that we do it under pretense. Satan did not try to hide his true intentions from Jesus. Imagine that — the one time Satan was honest! In either case, boldness or pretense, we are not obeying Jesus’ command, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Mat. 4:8-10):

1. “Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have **glory from men**. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mat. 6:2, emp. added).
2. “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be **seen by men**. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mat. 6:5, emp. added).
3. “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For

they disfigure their faces that they **may appear to men** to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mat. 6:16), emp. added)

4. “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the **best** seats in the synagogues, and the **best** places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a **pretense** make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation” (Luke 20:46-47, emp. added).

Righteousness for the glorification of self is self-righteousness. Worship offered by the self-righteous person does not ascend to God; it falls right back down onto himself:

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and **prayed thus with himself**, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who **exalts himself** will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14, emp. added).

PRIDE POINTING THE WRONG WAY

Sometimes when pride intersects with worship we

find that worship is completely directed away from God. This is also similar to Satan's objective in tempting Jesus, yet different in that we are not asking the Lord to bow down to us — we are bowing down to something other than the Lord. In either case, God is not getting the glory; we are still not obeying Jesus' command, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Mat. 4:8-10):

Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in **false humility** and **worship of angels**, intruding into those things which he has not seen, **vainly puffed up** by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God (Col. 2:18-19, emp. added).

The brethren at Colossae were warned against people who would cheat them of their reward by delighting in the worship of angels. These kinds of people would intrude into things they had not actually seen; we might say, they would "[go] on in detail about visions" (Col. 2:18, English Standard Version) that they supposedly had. If the two thoughts (angel worship and visions) are connected, they had the liberty of making the whole thing up! They had never actually had a revelation from or about angels, and they certainly did not get it in God's word. Who was really honored in angel worship, then? The worshipper, but certainly not God. The worshipper honored (*proskuneo*) themselves ("vainly puffed up"), not God.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because,

although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Rom. 1:20-25).

The brethren at Rome were told of the wrath of God upon ungodly and unrighteous men (Rom. 1:18). These kinds of people would profess to be wise, but to profess wisdom without showing it is to “boast and lie against the truth” (Jam. 3:13-140). These boastful worshippers worshipped images of man, birds, four-footed animals, and other creeping things — so, they worshipped and served the creature but not the Creator. These worshippers only honored (proskuneo) themselves: “they did not glorify Him as God.” In fact, when we look at the example of the Israelites making one of those four-footed images, this is what happened: “They made a calf in Horeb, And worshiped the molded image. Thus they changed their glory Into the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt” (Psa. 106:19-21). They did not worship God, they forgot God.

CONCEIT WEARING A CROWN

Sometimes when pride intersects with worship we find that the worshipper believes that he is worshipping God,

when God never asked for such worship. Any arrogant “I know better” kind of attitude is, once again, not in harmony with the Lord’s command, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Mat. 4:8-10) God is not worshipped if He did not desire the worship in question — He is offended:

So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, “Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, **he set up a monument for himself**; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal.” Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.” But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites; **for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God**; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.” Then Samuel said to Saul, ‘Be quiet! And I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night.’ And he said to him, ‘Speak on.’ So Samuel said, ‘**When you were little in your own eyes**, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?’ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. **But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the**

things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.' So Samuel said: 'Hast the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Sam. 15:12-23, emp. added).

The Lord does not want our worship when it is contrary to His commands. Worshipping (via sacrifice, in this instance) is wonderful, except when it comes at the expense of hurting God to do it. In effect, Saul's attitude was "I know I sinned against God, but I did it for God!" To see it written that way is ridiculous, yet we sometimes find ourselves justifying our worship the same way. Did God care that the people—and Saul (1 Sam. 15:9)—intended to worship the Lord with their spoil? He certainly cared, but not the way they had hoped. God wanted their obedience, not their sacrifices, nor their good intentions. "It does not matter how I worship God; surely God will be pleased when I worship from the heart," some may say. Yet again, Saul is an example in this regard. He was guilty of unauthorized worship by offering a sacrifice only Samuel was allowed to offer (1 Sam. 13:7-14). Look at what implications it had for his heart:

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. **The Lord has sought for Himself a man**

after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Sam. 13:7-14, emp. added).

To say that God did not care about Saul’s heart is not the right way to put it. He cared deeply. But to say that just because we do what we fervently desire to do in our heart means God must have fervently desired us to do it is completely antithetical to God’s word. The question that needs to be asked, regardless of our desires to the contrary, is “Am I keeping what the Lord commanded me?” If I am not, my heart and God’s heart are going in the opposite direction.

WORSHIP ME, ME, ME

The people of Amos’ day had a pride problem, too. Amos 6:8 says, “The Lord God has sworn by Himself, The Lord God of hosts says: ‘I abhor the pride of Jacob...’” If we are to speculate that this pride poisoned their worship, the Lord felt very strongly about it:

I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments (Amos 5:21-23).

They seemed to care more about their own pleasure than concepts such as “justice” or “righteousness” (Amos 5:24). It is evident from the next few verses, that they had worshipped other gods, even during the probation period of the wilderness wanderings (Amos 5:25-26)! And sandwiched between two verses which describe Israel’s

lazy kind of self-indulgence, we find these words: “Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David” (Amos 6:5). The idle singing corresponds with their lazy self-indulgence, but what about the “musical instruments like David?” David was never condemned for his invention or introduction of musical instruments for worship, as it had, evidently, met with God’s approval at that time (1 Chr. 15:16; 2 Chr. 29:25-27; cf. 2 Chr. 29:1-2). One wonders what this comment has to do with David. Perhaps it was their stark contrast with David. Perhaps they were singing songs of praises like David, but unlike David were singing them idly. They were songs of pleasure given over wholly to the indulgence of emotion without actually addressing God in adoration (Mat. 15:8). Their selfless worship had become a selfish concert and, as Amos 5:23 says, it had just become “noise.” Consider Tyndale’s assessment of God’s condemnation of them: “God stamps his disapproval on the religious transactions by branding them your feasts, your gatherings...your offerings, your fatted calves; this spate of religiosity is strictly the people’s doing” (section 5, sub-point ii). In other words, when we take God out of worship, we replace “holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4:8-11) with “me, me, me.” And when our focus is “me, me, me” God says, “I hate, I despise,” and “I cannot stand the stench” (Amos 5:21, Holman Christian Standard Bible with Strongs; for this translation see footnote in *American Standard Version*).

Do we see the picture? Every time we insert pride into our worship we kick God out of our worship. In other words, every time we insert ourselves—our own opinions, our made up religion, our self professed wisdom, or our

showboating— God is not glorified. So, if we need to part ways with pride and take ourselves out of the audience of worship, we echo the words of John the Baptizer, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

WHEN THE CURTAINS OPEN

If our goal is to draw closer to God (Jam. 4:8), then understanding the true audience of our worship is essential. After Satan’s vain attempt at being the audience of worship he was told “away with you” (Mat. 4:10). If God says “away with you” in our worship, it will become “I never knew you; depart from Me,” in the day of judgment (Mat. 7:21-23). When the stage curtain opens will we be on the correct side of it? Who will we see in the audience? Who does God command worship to be directed toward? Consider the following passages:

The Who of Worship

1. Exo. 20:1-6: “I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before Me.”
2. Deu. 6:13-15: “ You shall fear the Lord your God... you shall not go after other gods.”
3. Deu. 10:20-21: “You shall fear the Lord your God, you shall serve Him... He is your praise.”
4. 1 Sam. 7:3: We are to “prepare [our] hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only.”
5. Mat. 4:8-10: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”
6. Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9: “Worship God!”

It is not hard to see that God alone is the audience of our worship, but it is worth noting that God did not have

to enumerate every last entity and non-entity not to worship so long as He commanded who to worship. For example, Deuteronomy 17:2-5 indicates that “wicked” worship is worship which God says “I have not commanded.” (Note: such appears to be the correct Hebrew rendering of verse 3, contra ESV; see footnote in NET). If God did not command us to worship something, it is sufficient for us to understand not to worship it. And God never said “do not worship Satan,” yet Jesus clearly understood from scripture that He was not to be worshipped as His argument was based on the exclusivity of who God commanded to be worshipped (Mat. 4:10; cf. Deu. 6:13).

The Who Not of Worship

Yet, God’s word does not stop at only positive commands. We do see specific commands and examples concerning who or what is not the audience of our worship:

1. “Other gods,” or “carved image” (Exo. 20:3-5).
2. Non-carved image, like a “tree,” or otherwise objects that represent a god or the power of a god like “sacred pillars” (Exo. 23:24-25; Exo. 34:13-14; Deu. 16:21-22).
3. “Sun,” “moon,” “stars,” or any of the “host of heaven” (Deu. 4:19-20).
4. Humans, even important ones like “Moses” and “Elijah” (prophets), “Peter” (an apostle), or “Herod” (a secular ruler) (Mat. 17:2-5; Acts 10:25-26; Acts 12:21-23).
5. Angels (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8-9).
6. Things or idols of the heart (“covetousness, which is idolatry”) (Col. 3:5).

7. Self-worship (Mat. 4:8-10; Phi. 3:18-19).
8. Money (Mat. 6:24).
9. Created creature (Rom. 1:22-25).
10. Demons (1 Cor. 10:19-21; Rev. 9:20).
11. Devil (Mat. 4:8-10).

The Why of Worship

The scripture does not only give us the who and who not to worship but also the why of worship. **Why** is our worship to be directed only to God but no-one and nothing else?

1. Exo. 20:1-6: “The Lord...brought you out of the land of Egypt” and He is “a jealous God” who will punish those who hate Him, but bless those who love Him and keep His commands.
2. Deu. 6:12-15 (cf. Deu. 4:19-20): “The Lord... brought you out of the land of Egypt” and “The Lord your God is a jealous God.”
3. Deu. 10:21: He “has done for you these great and awesome things which our eyes have seen.”
4. 1 Chr. 16:23-26: “His salvation,” “His glory,” “His wonders,” “For the Lord is great,” all other gods are not real (“idols”) — “But the Lord made the heavens.”
5. 1 Chr. 29:10-11: “All that is in heaven and in earth is Yours... And You are exalted as head over all.”
6. Neh. 9:5-6: “You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all.”
7. Psa. 18:3: God “is worthy to be praised”

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8. Psa. 63:3: God's "loving-kindness is better than life."
 9. Psa. 86:9-10: "You alone are God."
 10. Psa. 99:1-5: "The Lord reigns," He is "high above all the peoples," His name is "great and awesome," and He is "holy."
 11. Psa. 100:1-5; cf. Psa. 95:6-7: "He is God," He "made us, and not we ourselves," we are "His people," and "The Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations."
 12. Psa. 103:1-5: God "forgives all your iniquities."
 13. Isa. 25:1; cf. Psa. 40:5, Psa. 66:4-5, Psa. 111:4-5: "You have done wonderful things."
 14. Rom. 11:36: "Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things."
 15. Rev. 4:8-11: God is "holy, holy, holy," "Almighty," and He "created all things and by [His] will they exist and were created."
 16. Rev. 5:11-14: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

When we break down this sampling of passages, we distinguish at least five categories of reasons given that show why God alone is worthy to be praised:

1. Character: When Isaiah was in the presence of God, he saw a difference between himself and his Lord. The Lord was "sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). The worshipping, angelic being above the throne covered his face and feet,

as if to say “the Lord is too holy to look upon,” and “my feet are too dirty to be in His presence” (Isa. 6:2). And he cried out “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3-4)! Isaiah realized that in comparison to the Lord he was a “man of unclean lips” in need of forgiveness (Isa. 6:5). In a nutshell, this is why He is on the throne “high and lifted up,” and we are to “worship at His footstool” (Psa. 99:5).

2. Creation: The “world and everything in it” was created by God (Acts 17:24; cf. John 1:1-3). In fact, we are wholly dependent on Him because He “has determined [our] preappointed times and the boundaries of [our] dwellings” (Acts. 17:26) and “in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We would not even exist to worship without His creating (and sustaining) power, so what makes us think worship could extend to any other than the Creator? Truly, the One who deserves our worship is the One who is so great He does not even need it (Acts 17:25)!

3. Salvation: When the Corinthians were divided in recognition of their favorite preachers/personalities, how did Paul reason with them? “Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul” (1 Cor. 1:12-13)? His point was not “Out of all the names listed, Christ is the most worthy of praise” — no, He is the only one on the list. Paul’s point was that Christ was the only one worthy of praise. He paid the price, He gets the praise (Acts 20:28; cf. Acts 4:12). For the same reason, praise can also be given

to the Father who “gave His only begotten Son,” (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8) and the Spirit by who’s word we are saved (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; Rom. 1:16; Col. 1:3-6).

4. Condemnation: God is the Only one with the power to condemn in any real, lasting sense: “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” (Mat. 10:28). Man may try to kill us for not worshipping who or what they think should be worshipped (Dan. 3), but God can kill us, too (Luke 12:5). The tie breaker is the fact that only He can condemn us to hell. We should rather praise the living God than fall into His hands (Heb. 10:31; cf. Jer. 20:8-11).

5. Blessings: We can (and are commanded to) emulate the way God blesses (Mat. 5:43-48), and we are expected to use opportunities to “do good to all” (Gal. 6:10) and to use money or goods to “give to him who has need” (Eph. 4:28). But how could we bless others were it not for God blessing us first? Solomon said,

Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise
Your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my
people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as
this? For all things come from You, And of Your own
we have given You (1 Chr. 29:13-14).

The ones who pridefully say to themselves “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth” (Deu. 8:17) are the ones who forget God (Deu. 8:11) and end up worshipping their idol of choice (Deu. 8:19; read Deu. 8:6-9:6). Our blessings come from God and we cannot out-bless Him because “every good” and “perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17, emp. added). He alone is to be praised for His goodness.

THE POLITICS OF PRIDE IN PRAISE

Does America have a problem with pride in praise? In other words, has American religion set man as the audience of worship to draw bigger crowds and/or please themselves? This could happen in at least two ways which work toward the same end: (1) Man can be the audience on stage (choirs, praise teams, bands, song-leaders, preachers). Under the pretense of praising or preaching God, they are seeking the praise of the pew-sitters (see Mat. 6:2; Mat. 6:5, Mat. 6:16). (2) Man can be the audience in the audience (the pew-sitters). In other words the preacher (choir, praise team, band, song-leader) is on stage, but he is praising the audience so they will praise him in return. Or, even mic-ed singers (ex. for aid in four-part harmony) in the audience can become just like this. They are in the pews, but just because they are facing the direction of the song-leader instead of the direction of the pew-sitters does not mean their heart is facing the right direction. For example, one Sunday we visited a congregation with singers with microphones. During the Bible class hour, the singers who we learned would later be mic'd up had their singing practice rather than attending Bible class. As if it weren't telling enough that they would skip Bible class for that use, they invited us to come and listen to them if we wanted. At the end of one song during the worship service, one of the ladies ripped the hand-held microphone away from her face with a dramatic flourish — I suppose she was proud of herself.

Remember Saul? He was a mixture of praising himself and pleasing the people, presumably, so that he would not lose their praise of him. We know he thought too highly

of himself because “he set up a monument for himself” (1 Sam. 15:12). And we know that this pride was at the root of his problems because the Lord specifically reminded him of how He blessed him when he was humble: “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel” (1 Sam. 15:17)? It appears that God was saying that the prideful exaltation of self and selfish desires to “swoop down on the spoil” (1 Sam. 15:19) was no way to win His favor — If he really wanted to please God he would have remained “little in [his] own eyes,” because that is how blessings came the first time. As Jesus said: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Mat. 23:12). But Saul was also a people pleaser, and given what we know about him already, we can see it as a logical extension of wanting their praise in return. In 1 Samuel 15:9, it was “Saul and the people” who spared “Agag” and “all that was good.” Saul was just as guilty as the people, if not more, but he blamed most of it on the people when cornered by Samuel: “They have brought them from the Amalekites” (1 Sam. 15:15); “But the people took of the plunder” (1 Sam. 15:21). When he finally took the blame and said “I have sinned” (1 Sam. 15:24), he confessed “I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (1 Sam. 15:24). In the New Testament, we find the same dilemma concerning the rulers:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43).

Saul knew what God desired of him, just as the rulers “believed.” But just as the rulers wanted to receive exaltation from men more than God’s exaltation, Saul wanted wanted the same. He wanted to be praised by his people (remember the monument?) — he wanted to be the audience. The only lasting monument to Saul would be the testimony of scripture of a miserable, angry man who had forsaken God. (See also the example of Jeroboam whose power-hungry heart changed God’s pattern of worship to keep hold on the people, 1 Kin. 12:26-33.)

“You will know them (false teachers) by their fruit” (Mat. 7:16; cf. 2 Pet. 2:1) — the Osteens (Joel and his wife) are well-known by their fruit. Their church (the Lakewood Church, Houston, TX) is is the largest church in America with a weekly attendance of approximately 50,000 people (Elizabeth). There are prominent religious figures in America who denounce Joel Osteen, like John McArthur (“John McArthur Rebukes Joel Osteen”). So, while not all religious people fall into his camp, the fact that Lakewood Church is the largest may be an indication of some of the religious leanings of America, generally.

If you visit Lakewood’s website, you will find that their “What We Believe” section, literally, has no scripture. They claim “We believe the entire Bible is inspired by God, without error and the authority on which we base our faith, conduct and doctrine” (Lakewood Church. We Believe). This is an admirable claim — yet they offer no scripture to even defend their belief in scripture. On the same page, under the “More Resources” banner, there is a link to “find out more about what we believe about topics such as Marriage, Family, Finances and more.” Yet, the link takes you to Joel Osteen’s self named website (www.joelosteen.com).

joelosteen.com), and that invitation to “find out more about what we believe” has no readily available remedy to their lack of scripture in the “What We Believe” section. Rather, you will find “Joel and Victoria’s [his wife] Blog,” a link to buy tickets for an upcoming event, and interviews. The irony of not having any Bible references attached to their beliefs is rich, but it indicates just how spiritually poor many people in America are.

Watch some of Joel’s sermons and you will find he fulfills the prophecy in 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

The opening mantra in his sermons, to which the audience of thousands stands and repeats together, some holding their Bibles aloft, is: “This is my Bible, I am what it says I am, I have what it says I have, I can do what it says I can do. Today, I will be taught the word of God. I boldly confess my mind is alert, my heart is receptive; I will never be the same — in Jesus name” (“Joel Osteen Pit Praisers”). He starts off every sermon with that mantra about the Bible, but ends every sermon having soothed itching ears and preaching fables. Will you hear scripture? Not much. Now, count how many times you hear scripture in its proper context to prove a point that is consistent with the rest of scripture and it will be even less. What about scripture references? It is not sinful to give only a scripture quotation/summation with no chapter or verse, or even a book (see Stephen’s sermon, Acts 7). Consider, however, that Stephen was speaking to

Jews, among whom were priests and scribes (Acts 6:12), but in an audience large enough that it fills a former basketball stadium, it would not be uncommon to have people unfamiliar with the scriptures who need to be able to “search the scriptures” to “find out whether these things [are] so” (Acts 17:11). Given Joel’s tactics as a wolf in sheep’s clothing (Mat. 7:15), the lack of scripture references, albeit not inherently sinful, appears to be to his strategic advantage. It is not uncommon to see people in the audience taking notes — they have a great deal of motivational and “prosperity gospel” material to take notes on, but not much truth to read. If they do not open their Bibles, they will never know they are being lied to (Eph. 4:14).

Victoria Osteen is co-pastor of Lakewood Church (Lakewood Church. Victoria Osteen). She once preached this message:

I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God, we’re not doing it for God —I mean that’s one way to look at it— we’re doing it for ourself, because God takes pleasure when we’re happy. That’s the thing that gives him the greatest joy this morning. So I want you to know this morning, just do good for your own-self. Do good because God wants you to be happy: when you come to church, when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God, really; you’re doing it for yourself because that’s what makes God happy. Amen? (“Victoria Osteen God wants you happy and Church is about you?”)

What was that? “When we obey God, we’re not doing it for God...when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God, really.” She has tried to clarify this comment (Martin), but her original quote above is in full harmony with their consistent

preaching that religion is all about our earthly benefit. When obeying God is not even about God, it is no wonder we see worship that does not even try to obey Him. Such is the case, not only in the preaching (or lack thereof) at Lakewood but in the kind of worship that results from it with instrumental music and a praise team. Any Biblical issue one may have with this kind of worship is a non-issue when obeying God isn't even about God anymore and worship is all about self.

Though the Lakewood Church can be an extreme example of taking God's place in praise, other denominations sometimes practice this in less overt ways. One of the large, local methodist churches in my area offers a "traditional" and a "contemporary" service (First United Methodist Church, Shreveport). Of course, both services include instruments. The execution of it is different, but the operating principle is the same: placing man in the audience of worship; not God — give the people what they want! This American issue has even affected the Lord's church. Not too far down the road from me is the White's Ferry Road church of Christ in West Monroe, LA. It is the congregation made famous in more recent years by the A&E Network series, "Duck Dynasty," starring the Robertson family. The sign out front no longer says "church of Christ" but instead says "WFR Church." And they offer two services, one non-instrumental and one instrumental. The upcoming Easter Sunday service at the time of this writing (2019) will offer both services at the same time but in two different areas of the church complex (WFR Church). I do not presume to think that they are not sincere in their faith (e.g. they may sincerely believe instrumental worship is Biblically acceptable). I am concerned, however, about the faith. They may have zeal

in their beliefs, but is it “according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2)? Or will they be destroyed for lack of it (Hos. 4:6)?

PRINCIPLES TO ADDRESS PRIDE IN OUR PRAISE

If God is the audience of our worship, how can we worship Him in a way that He does not want? In other words, if our end goal is to please our audience, how can we achieve it by giving Him what He does not want? What are some principles to take self out of the audience and give selfless worship to God?

Worship is a Heart Issue (Pt. 1)

Jesus commanded,

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

When God commands us to worship, who to worship, or how to worship, He does not desire grudging obligation: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John. 5:3). He expects love, and with love comes “spirit,” zeal, and enthusiasm! Love lifts the burden and brings joy! It is just as prideful to worship without zeal as it is to worship with misplaced zeal (Rom. 10:2). Why? Because both have at their root a lack of love for God. I find no merit in the idea that worship is an attitude. It is an action recognizable by certain time parameters, locations, or actions (Gen. 22:1-5; 2 Sam. 12:20; Mat. 2:2; Acts 8:27-28; Acts 24:11). However,

who we revere inwardly is who we will express reverence to outwardly. There is no bowing down (proskuneo) without the heart bowing down first. And if we bow down without the heart bowing down first, then our worship is not “true” (John 4:23); it is not truly worship at all. If we come to worship the Lord and say “Oh what a weariness!” or if we’re giving God the “stolen,” “lame,” or “sick” sacrifices (Mal. 1:13) (think: singing without joy, not paying attention to the words, etc.) then God wishes we would just “shut the doors” of the church building and not come at all (Mal. 1:10). If we have no pleasure in God, then God has no pleasure in us (ibid; cf. Deu. 28:45-47). “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful” (Psa. 147:1).

Worship is a Heart Issue (Pt. 2)

Yet, if our hearts’ desire does not match the desire of God’s heart, we are worshiping at the expense of truth. “True” worship is that which contains both “spirit” and “truth” (John 4:23-24). Worship in truth is worship that conforms to God’s word because God’s word “is truth” (John 17:17). The significance of this is that God’s heart is revealed through scripture and we cannot have a heart “after God’s own heart” by disobeying scripture:

But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself **a man after His own heart**, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, **because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you**” (1 Sam. 13:14, emp. added).

The converse is seen in the heart of David: “And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king,

to whom also He gave testimony and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after My own heart, who will do all My will**” (Acts 13:22, emp added). How was Saul no longer a man after God’s heart? By not keeping what the Lord commanded. In that context, what command had he violated? According to 1 Samuel 13:11-13, he worshipped God with a sacrifice God did not desire. How can we have the right heart in worship without following God’s commands? We cannot.

The Scriptures contain all the information necessary for a person to become everything that God wants him to be (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In other words, the Scripture contains all the information necessary for a person to become acceptable to God in every sphere and circumstance of life. And since being a true worshipper is part of what God seeks in each person (John 4:23), logic dictates that within Scripture God has revealed exactly what makes worship “true.” ... There is a tendency today for many professing Christians to put more trust in their own intuition when it comes to meeting God’s expectations — especially in the sphere of worship. Those who are disposed to this tendency need to be reminded, however, that intuition is not a reliable compass in any spiritual matter — including worship. The very existence of the Bible proves this fact. If people were capable of determining intuitively what God would and would not accept, why would God bring Scripture into being? What purpose would it possibly serve? And if people were capable of determining intuitively what God would and would not accept, why would God call people to read Scripture, study it, embrace its teaching, and preach it? (Acts 17:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:15; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 4:2). (Chambers, 153-154)

If our pattern for praise is found in our own heart (e.g. intuition, feelings), what if our heart (mind) is set on “earthly things” (Phi. 3:19)? What if our heart is set on iniquity (Hos. 4:8)? What if our hearts are inclined to forsake God’s commandments (Num. 15:39)? What if our heart has been deceived (Deu. 11:16)? What if we bless ourselves in our hearts when God has cursed us for false worship (Deu. 29:14-20)? What if our heart has taken joy in false worship (Jud. 18:20)? What if our heart is not loyal to God (1 Kin. 8:61)? What if the meditation of our heart is not acceptable to God (Psa. 19:14)? What if our heart is stubborn (Psa. 81:12)?

By default, we do not see ourselves in this position: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts” (Pro. 21:2). This is why God warned us about the heart: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it” (Jer. 17:9)? “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered” (Pro. 28:26). And this is why we are instructed concerning the heart: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Pro. 3:5-7). “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life” (Pro. 4:23). And this leads us right back to the word of God: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Psa. 119:11).

Authority Matters

In matters of worship, authority matters. In the Old Testament, instrumental music was used by the authority of King David: “Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy” (1 Chr. 15:16; cf. 1 Chr. 23:5). And when men of God in later years tried to re-establish proper worship practice, they used David as their authority:

And he [Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, **according to the commandment of David**, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets and **with the instruments of David king of Israel** (2 Chr. 29:25-27, emp. added).

Please see also Ezra 3:10-11 (“according to the ordinance of David king of Israel”) and Nehemiah 12:31-36 (“with the musical instruments of David the man of God”).

That they were concerned with doing things right in the eyes of God is evident in the overt mention of having the proper authority for their worship practice. And they had ample reason to want to (see Lev. 10:1-3; 1 Chr. 13:7-10; 1 Chr. 15:11-15). Why did they take David as the authority? 1) David was a prophet of God and thus had access to God’s will (Acts 2:29-31; cf. 1 Sam. 16:13;). In

fact, they had the authority of three prophets for the practice of instrumental music in 2 Chronicles 29:25: David, Gad, and Nathan. On one occasion Nathan gave his approval for David's plan to build the Temple for the Lord's worship, assuming the Lord would approve of it, but the Lord came to him with news to the contrary (see 2 Sam. 7:1-13; 2 Chr. 6:7-9). So, had David's worship not been approved by God, the Lord would have come to one of them as He did to Nathan and corrected the error. 2) Consider that when other kings failed in the area of worship —false gods, idols, sacred pillars, high places, places, people, or times of worship not designated, defiling the temple, etc. — God let His disapproval be known (see 1&2 Kings). God never mentioned any such disapproval of David's instruments. Since God's law concerning the tent/temple worship that David had established had not been altered or condemned by God, no authority existed to substantiate a change in practice. Thus, men who desired to follow God's law, hearkened back to David for their authority.

By the time of the New Testament, did David have authority any longer? A new age of worship had dawned (John 4:21) where the temple (and its attendant instruments) would no longer be in service. A new will had been left behind after Jesus's death (Heb. 9:16-17). "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mat. 28:18). All the prophetic authority in the world cannot match Jesus (Mat. 3:13-17; Mat. 17:1-5; 1 Pet. 1:10-11)! After Jesus' departure, He gave authority to the apostles by the Holy Spirit:

John 14:25 – These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.

John 14:26 – But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

John 16:12 – I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

John 16:13 – However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 16:14 – He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

John 16:15 – All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

We do not worship “according to the commandment of David” (2 Chr. 29:25)— we worship according to the commandment of the Apostles — in actuality, in accordance to the commandment of the Holy Spirit and of the Lord. If the Apostles taught it, 1) it was by Jesus’ authority (“in My name,” John 14:26), 2) it was complete (“teach you all things” and “bring to your remembrance all things,” John 14:26; “all truth,” John 16:13), 3) It was to the glory of Jesus (John 16:14), and 4) it was something either Jesus already taught on earth (“bring to your remembrance all things I said to you,” John 14:26) or something He would teach them after His departure (“He will take of what is mine and declare it to you,” John 16:14-15).

How, then, do the apostles designate worship? The apostle 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). Does this teaching have Jesus’ authority? Is this teaching complete? Does this teaching glorify Jesus? Is this teaching, ultimately, from the Lord? If we can answer yes to these questions, to do anything other than sing is not authorized by the Lord. Is it really such a big deal to have authority for how we worship? Authority is not just an Old Testament concern. Consider the very next verse: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3:17). In matters of religion, if we cannot do it in Jesus’ name (by His authority, permission, seal of approval), we are disobeying Him.

Thus, we do not worship with the musical instruments of David, we worship with the instruments that God has given, the mouth and the heart. God has defined worship for us here in Col. 3:16-17: 1) God ordained worship must be in harmony with the “word of Christ dwelling in us richly in all wisdom,” 2) it must be able to teach and admonish one another, 3) it must be expressed in singing, 4) it must be sung from a heart of grace, 5) it must be expressed to the Lord, and 6) it must have the authority of Jesus. Anything that cannot fulfill all these criteria cannot fulfill worship, since all these criteria make up acceptable worship. If we compare instrumental praise to this, or any other kind of praise (humming, beat boxing, vocal noises, ooh’s and ah’s, clapping, dancing, etc.) we will see why God does not allow other forms of worship. Are instruments in harmony with

the word of Christ? He nor His Apostles ever indicated such. Can instruments teach or admonish? Teaching and admonishing demand the use of words. Can instruments sing? Singing demands the use of words. Can instrumental music be sung from a heart of grace? Singing demands words. Can instrumental music be expressed to the Lord? Not if the Lord does not desire it. And can instrumental music worship the Lord while having the Lord's authority? If we do not have it in writing (e.g. the New Testament), then we do not have His permission to do it. And if we do not have His permission to do it, we have violated God's law by placing ourselves in the audience of worship. If Jesus is truly our all, our "life," (Col. 3:4) we should be content to make Him happy by worshipping His way.

CONCLUSION

So much more could be said on this immense topic. Suffice it to say that if we are prideful, it will affect our praise because God will be taken from the audience and replaced with ourselves. But if we presume to take God's place, He will not allow us to enter His place of rest — there is no paradise at the end of the path of the prideful. He alone is worthy of our worship. His word alone is the standard of our worship. And we alone can determine whether or not He is the audience of our worship.

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Freedom Of Speech: Taming The Tongue

Kenny Townsley



Kenny has been married to Annette for 22 years and together, they have 2 sons, Kendall and Jonathan. As newlyweds, work brought them to the Southaven area. They began attending the Southaven church of Christ. One year later Kenny obeyed the Gospel. After almost 4 years in Southaven, they moved back home to Arkansas. Kenny began to do some fill in work in small congregations. Since 2004, he has worked fulltime with the Lynn Church of Christ in Lynn, AR. The POWER Lectureship along with a bear and book drive for LeBonheur has been an annual event for this family for many years.

I am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of the Power lectureship. Teaching that has come from the lectures in times past continue to strengthen Christians daily. My family has been blessed by this faithful teaching along with the fellowship that has built great friendships over the last several years.

It is my desire that the following writing encourages the reader to open the Bible. Due to the nature of this lesson, some outside resources were used and this opens the door for errors. I am just a human and subject to making mistakes, but you have available the inspired words of God. Please use those to confirm every word in this writing and all teaching you ever come in contact with. This writing will use scripture from The King James Version of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

Those of us that live in the United States are truly blessed. The rights and freedoms that are given and protected by our U.S. Constitution are unlike any other nation throughout history. Many will debate the direction of this country, but there is no doubt that the beginning was truly blessed by God.

As a Christian here in the United States, one of the freedoms that we should be most thankful for is the freedom of speech. We can fulfill the commands given to us throughout the New Testament with a protected right to speak freely. Paul petitioned the brethren at Colossae to pray that he would have the chance to speak. “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. 4:3). We, as American citizens, literally have the door left open for us. In that passage, Paul also points out his current bondage, which was primarily caused by his willingness to speak. Unfortunately, we as American Christians often do not step through that door of utterance even though the worst case scenario is not as severe as Paul’s situation when writing the passage above.

We have been given much when it comes to freedom of speech. Our responsibility is to be good and faithful stewards of this gift. In the passage below we see an exchange between Jesus and His apostles, especially Peter, that lets us understand the attitude of our Lord toward our stewardship of much.

Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man
cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter

said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:40-48).

This reading is typical when the Bible teaches about being a servant or steward. It contains both do's and don'ts, and our stewardship of the freedom of speech follows that pattern. There are things we are to do and there are things that we cannot do when it comes to our speech.

THINGS WE CANNOT DO

This lesson could be very short. There is one verse that should direct us in our communications. "Let no

corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers”(Eph. 4:29). No “what ifs,” and no “what about this situation.” The only qualifier found in this verse is the small yet difficult word “no.”

There are many forms of corrupt communication in the world. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) these forms of communication are not First Amendment protected. The enforcement by the FCC is reliant on reporting by the consumer. In most cases, these corrupt communications are socially accepted, so there is no reporting. Social acceptance does not give us as Christians a license to become a part of the world, it actually gives us another opportunity to be set apart from the world.

We are going to look at 4 types of corrupt communication that the world accepts, but the Christian cannot be a participant.

Profanity: Most of the world, especially this country, accepts and even celebrates profanity. We are going to narrow profanity down to vulgar, foul language or as we often call it “cussing.” Biblically, profane language is much broader than that. Foul language has permeated culture through TV, music, movies and other forms of entertainment.

A. TV: With the invention of the television in the late 1920s a new form of entertainment was offered (Hur). As more and more homes were able to afford this appliance the offering for programming increased dramatically. Now less than 100 years later most

homes have multiple ways to receive what we would call “television” programming. Many of the outlets are subscription services and are not regulated by the FCC. Most programming is laced with language that should be unacceptable to Christians, but subscription programming is especially sinful. One study showed that between 10 and 20 swear words were used per 1000 words of dialogue in some of the most popular shows. One episode of South Park used a word that the FCC deems obscene 200 times in one episode (Kublin). It is difficult to see the proper stewardship of the right of free speech in examples like these.

B. Music: Looking at the Billboard Top 100 from 2017, more than two-thirds of the songs that charted number one feature explicit lyrics (Ross). These are the most popular songs for an entire year across all genres. We as a society have a thirst for things that are profane.

C. Movies: It should come as no surprise that Hollywood has jumped on the obscene language craze. Martin Scorsese is one of the most well-known directors in film. His top-grossing film worldwide included 506 uses, which was a Guinness record, of one of the few words that most still consider vulgar (Thorne). People across the world spent over \$300,000,000 to listen to that type of language (McClintock).

We live in a world that is hungry for profanity and that hunger is being fed with large amounts of money. As long as this is the case, Christians will have to be diligent in abstaining from the influence that is so prevalent. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”(1 Cor. 5:33). This verse rings just as true

today as ever. If we partake in evil communications we will be corrupted even if it is our right and freedom to do so.

Taking the Lord's Name in Vain: The simple directive that is given in Exodus 20:7 is often misquoted. We tend to focus on the first part of the verse when the second part is the pronouncement of judgment. The verse reads "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." We understand the serious nature of the often quoted "thou shalt not" much better when the last part is read.

The idea of proper use of the name of the Lord carries into the New Testament. When Jesus' followers asked Him to teach them to pray in Matthew 6 we read in verse 9 "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, **Hallowed be thy name**" (emp. mine). Our Savior understood the importance of placing the proper reverence on the things of God, including His name.

We often want to see how close we can get to sin instead of seeing how far we can remove ourselves from it. This is the case with taking the Lord's name in vain. Popular are "OMG" and "Geez" and other such abbreviated terms. These are more socially acceptable forms than what most of the population consider taking the Lord's name in vain. Once again social acceptance does not give us the right to go against what is so plainly forbidden.

My method to help me understand this idea of taking the Lord's name in vain was simple. I went to a

Strong's Concordance and looked at the word "vain," both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. What follows below is some examples of different Hebrew and Greek words that are translated vain. These words will be identified by Strong's numbering system.

Strong's 7723 rush over, leave desolate

Deuteronomy 5:11 - "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

Strong's 7386 empty, worthless

Proverbs 12:11 - "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding."

Strong's 1891 to be lead astray

2 Kings 17:15 - "And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them."

Strong's 1892 emptiness

Jeremiah 10:3 - "For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe."

Strong's 2756 empty

Acts 4:25 - "Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?"

Strong's 2757 empty sounding

1 Timothy 6:20 - "O Timothy, keep that which

is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:"

Strongs 3152 empty, profitless

1 Corinthians 3:20 - "And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

Strongs 2761 to no purpose

James 4:5 - "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"

These words translated "vain" throughout scripture give us a great picture of how God would have us handle the things that are His. His things are high, Holy and reverent. Vain things are empty, void and hollow.

Christians should strive to separate themselves from the lingo of the day that cozies up to sin. We should only use the name of the Lord and all things associated with it in the context of giving Him the honor and praise that is His. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord" (Psa. 150:6).

Lying: The following two verses place the proper emphasis on the subject of lying.

Revelation 21:8 - "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."

John 8:44 - "Ye are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Straightforward would be an understatement when describing the tone of these verses, but mankind still wants to find a way to make lying acceptable. “Situation ethics,” “little white lie,” “not hurting feelings” etc., are all ways that people justify a lie. This type of thinking has allowed lying to become acceptable even to the very highest levels of our leadership in the United States. That little word “all” placed before liars in Revelation 21:8 takes away the idea of any lie being acceptable.

The verses referenced above place lying alongside sins that are often deemed as the worst of the worst by those that have religious leanings. The Bible clearly does not differentiate in the severity of these sins and places the end result of all these sins exactly the same. The Bible also shows us clearly in John 8:44 that we serve the father of lies when we chose to lie. This separates us from serving The One True God.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Mat. 6:24).

Gossip: This particular sin of the tongue is tricky. It can creep into most situations and hardly be noticed. We live in a world where there seems to be a value in being the first to have information, especially if it is negative. The local congregation and the Church as a whole are not immune. Christians have to be overly aware of gossip. The King James version of the Bible does not use the word gossip, but it uses other words that actually help us see that gossip takes on many forms. You can see from the verses that follow that there are

several different words used depending on the intent of the one “spreading the news.”

2 Corinthians 12:20 - “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and [that] I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest [there be] debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:”

Romans 1:29 - “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; and whisperers.”

1 Timothy 5:13 - “And withal they learn [to be] idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”

Psalms 101:5 - “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.”

Proverbs 20:19 - “He that goeth about [as] a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.”

Proverbs 16:28 - “A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.”

In this collection of passages we see everything from “whispering” to “backbiting.” We see reasons like envy, covetousness and malice. We also clearly see these things listed with other sins like fornication and murder. Not only are these forms of gossip listed alongside, they are listed as equals. Christians that would never dream of committing fornication or murder are often caught up in these sins that are clearly what we know as gossip.

No matter what our intentions are we must be very careful when relaying information, making sure we are not committing sin in the process.

THINGS WE CAN DO

Much of the world believes that the Bible is just a list of things we cannot do. Over the last several pages we have looked at some examples of the prohibitive verses. We are going to wrap up this writing with the things that the Bible tells us as Christians that we can and must do. This is going to be structured a little different. We have looked at outside sources for statistics and information about how the world has misused the blessing of freedom of speech. In this section the source will be the Bible. Following is a list of verses that give us instruction on how we can be good stewards of speech.

Matthew 28:19 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"

Psalms 96:3 - "Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people."

Mark 16:15 - "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

1 Corinthians 1:17 - "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

Colossians 3:16 - "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."

James 5:13 - "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

Hebrews 10:24 - "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"

Hebrews 3:13 - "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Ephesians 4:15 - "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:"

Psalms 19:14 - "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

Proverbs 15:1 - "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

Psalms 37:30 - "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment."

Proverbs 16:24 - "Pleasant words [are as] an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."

Notice how we don't have to go to an outside source. We don't have to consult an earthly expert in the field of speech. God has given us instruction and we have plenty of good things we can do when it comes to our speech. If we focus on the verses listed above and the others we have available in scripture, we will not have to worry about the sins of the tongue. We can and should be using the precious right of speech for good things. Filling our mind and life with these positive,

encouraging verses will directly affect us and surely have an effect on all those around us.

CONCLUSION

Blessings come with great responsibility. Unfortunately, man has used the blessing of speech, both oral and written, in very perverse ways. James 1:27 tells the Christian to remain undefiled and unspotted from the world. We must strive to do this. There are many things that have been looked at that Christians cannot do. Sins like profanity, vain talking, lying and gossip should be put away from the lives that we lead. This becomes much easier if we will focus on and follow the verses where God has given us simple instruction on what to do with the blessing of speech.

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Dying To Self In a Selfie Nation

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In almost every congregation of God's people there are Christians raising children that they did not conceive. There are adopted children, foster parents, and grandparents raising grandchildren. What possesses someone to take a child like that into their home and life? What motivates people who give up vacations and regular time off to participate in Vacation Bible School, youth trips, church camps and a variety of activities. What possesses someone to spend their time like that? There are Christians who have moved their entire families to foreign lands with foreign people and foreign languages. Why would they chose to leave behind the comforts and familiarity of the United States of America? All of these scenarios and questions have a common answer. At some point those people decided that what "they" needed is more important than what "I" want. Approaching life from that perspective is at the very heart of truly living like Christ.

The admonition for life choices as have been mentioned already is found in Philippians 2:3-4. Paul writes:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

If there are more specifically challenging words in the New Testament, they would be hard to find. When one thinks about how much in society personal ambition is promoted and celebrated, the words of Paul stand in stark contrast. He indicates that man should be thinking more about others than they do themselves. What comes so natural to every human being is to follow and pursue after his own desires. What takes intentionality is to put personal wants or desires on the back burner in order to pursue the interest of others.

One might wonder what would possess someone to live their life like this. The answer is simple, Jesus Christ. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). As idealistic as it might sound, this is exactly how Jesus lived every day of His life. He did not live for Himself. He lived and died for His creation. You might wonder what a person would do if they had the power of Jesus. He is the Creator! He spoke the world into existence. There is nothing beyond Him. He could have spoken a Holiday Inn Express into existence, yet we find that He had no place to lay His head. He had the power to feed thousands at once but would not use His power to turn stones into bread for Himself. He could have had the whole world, but He chose to die instead.

He did that because He understood that this life is not about self. It is about others. Jesus had a mission to fulfill that did not involve His own preferences or comfort, and everything in His life reflected an understanding that He esteemed the needs of man better than Himself. In doing so He left man an amazing example and challenge.

Philippians 2:6-7 continues,

Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

When people's lives are focused on self, they often speak of what they are owed or their achievements are heralded to be acknowledged. Most of the time those statements are overstatements. People are not quite as great or deserving as they would have others to believe. This was not so in the case of Jesus. He is God. He was residing in Heaven. He was in the place that most men say they live their entire lives trying to get to. Yet, He left there and came to live as a man. Interestingly, He didn't become a man who lived in the midst of luxury or with a crown that people would continually praise. He came as a baby to a poor family in a despised city. This is not exactly the ideal situation to be born. Yet, Jesus chose it because He decided that what man needed is more important than what would be easy for Him. Often, people say that things are not fair. "I should not have to give up my preferences for the weaker brother." You probably shouldn't. People should show me some respect and appreciation." They probably should. "They owe me!" They very well might owe you. "It is not right!"

Everyone acknowledges that truth. The reality is that Jesus should have never had to leave Heaven and die on the cross. When Jesus came to this world to live and die at the hands of His own creation, He should not have had to give up His preferences for weak men. People should have shown Him respect instead of spitting in His face. They owed the debt because of their sin, not Him. It was not fair that a sinless man should have to die for a sinful people. All of this is true, but Jesus did it anyway.

His sacrifice and example were not limited to easy and fun acts of service. Most people are more than willing to sign up to serve, but there are typically limits that are placed on service when it begins to interfere with personal choices in life. In His example, Jesus tears down all the limits of how far man ought to be willing to go in serving others.

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. 2:8).

When man looks at the example of how far Jesus was willing to prioritize others needs over His wants, he sees that Jesus takes it all the way to His own death. As if that were not challenging enough, Paul emphasizes, “even the death of the cross.” He was not just willing to die. Jesus was willing to die in a terrible and horrific way for the benefit of others. The Biblical model is not just about service when it is fun. It is about doing what is right even when it brings tears to your eyes and is a struggle. It is about doing what is right when that thing is something one has pleaded with the Heavenly Father

to provide some other answer. It is about serving even when it hurts and especially when it costs something.

The key to this sort of life that follows the example of Jesus is found in understanding that God does not ask us to make a whole bunch of little sacrifices. People get overwhelmed by constantly deciding if they are going to make this sacrifice or not make that sacrifice. What Christians must embrace is not that we are called to make sacrifices, but rather we are called to actually be the sacrifice. Paul writes in Romans 12:1,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Jesus was such a great servant because He saw Himself as the sacrifice in every arena of His life from washing people's feet to dying on the cross. If man would start to see themselves in this way it would help when harsh treatment must be endured. It would allow a man to love his enemies and turn the other cheek. It would solve the struggles of people not giving recognition that man feels is due. It would transform our marriage, both the good and the struggling ones. If man could only understand what Jesus understood, "I am the sacrifice!" it would change everything.

This sacrificial life of servanthood is the true path to greatness. The world continually tells man that he needs to promote himself and be his own biggest fan. Jesus says man must,

In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The result of this is seen in Philippians 2:9-11,

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The only path to greatness is to become a servant of all.

When the life of Jesus is examined the reader sees that at one point the people became so angry with Jesus that they wanted to throw Him off the edge of the cliff, but He passed through their midst (Luke 4:30). At one point the people loved Him so much that they wanted to force Him to wear a crown, but He departed from their midst (John 6:15). In John 18:4-6 a multitude of soldiers came to arrest Jesus and every one of them fell back onto the ground in His presence. Jesus looked at Pilate, the man who would determine whether He lived or died, and said, “You would have no power unless it was given to you” (John 19:11). As He hung on the cross, He really could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and been completely justified in doing so, but he die instead (Mat. 26:53). The point is that Jesus chose to live His life for others, no one made Him do that. The same is true of man today. No one will be forced to live for others, but anyone may choose to do that. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mat. 16:24).

Jesus: The Politically Incorrect Evangelist

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Let's begin by stating the obvious. Our problems in this country will not be solved in Washington D.C. Neither the President, Congress, nor our Courts can heal our sins. The church of Christ is dying in America. If a doctor walked in to an emergency room and saw a patient who looked like the churches of Christ, he would yell, "STAT! We are losing our patient and must do something immediately!" Each year we are losing over 100 congregations and 18,000 church members (Royster). We have a generation that has risen who knows not personal Bible study. We have children sitting in our pews who have never seen their father and mother have a Bible study. Sadly, it is not because we

don't have the remedy or resources; it is because most congregations have no target for which to aim, no plan to enact, and no method to employ.

Jesus was not and is not a politician. The title of this lesson is a play on words. The phrase "politically incorrect" when used as an adjective means, "not avoiding language or behavior that could offend a particular group of people" (*Merriam-Webster*). "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Mat. 23:33). There is no doubt, Jesus would fit the definition of being politically incorrect. As I listen to Christians, elders, and gospel preachers today, I wonder how many would be like Jesus and be considered politically incorrect?

Jesus was a revolutionary as His message was designed to change the status quo. His weapon of choice was unlike those used in wars today. "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Jesus was skilled in His use of the Word. He was the Master Evangelist. He never said the wrong things at the wrong time. He always knew how to speak to the lost. There is no one who has ever lived who cared more about sinners than our Lord. He embodied the perfect characteristics of soul saving. If we want to be successful in our outreach, then we should study, meditate, and apply His manner and method.

John 4 is one of the most politically incorrect chapters in the Bible. In it we find a violation of religious, racial, social, cultural, moral and national norms. It is a pattern for how to effectively reach the

lost. Let's notice how Jesus brought a most unlikely sinner to faith in God.

Jesus Did Not Let Culture Close Door To Souls.

“And he must needs go through Samaria” (John 4:4). This is the language of an evangelist and not a vacationer. If we want to be like Jesus, then our “going” needs to be purposed. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). Evangelism is not an urge or a bullet point; it is the whole of our work. Nothing should be allowed to deter or distract us from our mission.

Behind the word “must” is something much deeper than the resistance of the Pharisees or a geographical consideration. The target of Jesus' mission was Samaria. The Samaritans were the remnant leftover from the wicked Northern Kingdom that was destroyed by the Assyrians. The Jews who were left intermarried with non-Jews and became a mixed breed people called Samaritans. The “pure” Jews of the Southern Kingdom held them in disdain. Every effort, including rerouting a trip, was made to avoid contact with Samaritans. The very fact that Jesus saw a need to preach/teach to this group of people was a cultural shock to His disciples.

Brethren, prejudice is a terrible problem in almost every society, but it becomes an eternal stumbling block to those in the Kingdom. Our scope of teaching is “all nations” and “every creature” and any conscious effort to withhold the balm of Gilead due to any prejudice is repugnant and repulsive.

Jesus overcame fatigue. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore being wearied with His journey, sat

thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour” (4:6). Most of the great things done in the world are done by tired people. Paul said, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). As we travel around the nation training the saved to teach the lost, I see fatigue and weariness all over the faces of elders, deacons, and preachers. Many Christians have lost hope and are tired of experiencing failure after failure.

Heaven is a land of rest, but America is a land of work. “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11). Churches of Christ must work harder now than ever before if we are going to reverse the trend and grow again. Effective evangelism is not a job but a work and mission. We go to work when we are tired and complete a mission when fatigued. So too must we carry out our orders to evangelize when discouraged. Jesus said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Jesus began by engaging in friendly conversation.

There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink” (John 4:7). The dialogue is clearly a repetition of two phrases: “Jesus saith ... the woman saith.” According to Morgan, “Jesus opened the conversation; Jesus closed the conversation. He opened the conversation by asking a favour on the human level. He closed it by stating the supreme claim to Messiahship....” (Morgan 72). The question we are asked most often during our Personal Evangelism

seminars is how to get into a Bible study. Ironically, our answer is, “If you want a Bible study, don’t ask.” If you ask strangers for a Bible study, they are going to run for the hills.

“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro. 18:24). Jesus did not initiate a conversation about religion but about life. He was obviously thirsty and asked for something almost anyone would be willing to give. It was an icebreaker that would allow a deeper and more meaningful conversation to follow. People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Friendship and conversation are essential to successful evangelism.

Jesus chose a time when others were not around.

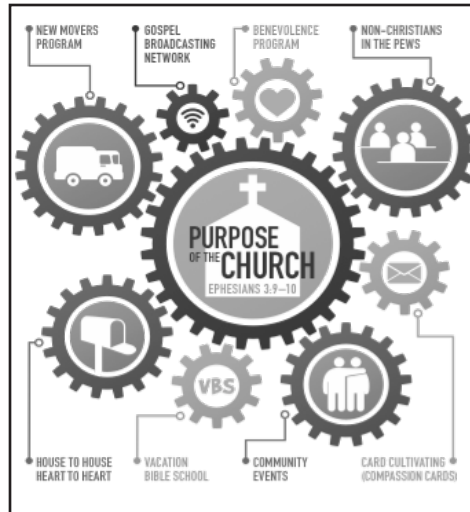
“For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat” (John 4:8). Most people don’t want to be embarrassed. Salvation is very personal, for it requires a discussion about each individual’s sin and spiritual condition. Privacy is very important in soul winning. Bible studies normally don’t take place in public places like Cracker Barrel and Walmart. The great evangelists Aquilla and Priscilla knew this well: “And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue...they took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26). Public shaming is needed for public sinning, but private study is needed for soul winning. When a visitor walks into your assembly, follow Jesus and begin with a private conversation before you move toward a personal Bible study.

Jesus was not put off by potentially offensive

statements. “Then said the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). The words and actions of Jesus were shocking to this woman, for Jesus had crossed the gender gap and ignored a time-honored religious censure. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Pro. 15:1). We must be prepared to deal with difficult issues. Responding with an equally or more potent offense is not an effective soul winning strategy! We must be prepared for those who say, “Doesn’t your church believe you are the only ones going to Heaven?” What about, “Why don’t you believe in music?” What if they say, “My friend growing up was a member of the church of Christ, and they told me I was going to Hell”?

When Paul visited Athens and his spirit was stirred due to the rampant idolatry, he found something good to say to begin his sermon: “In all things I perceive that ye are very religious” (Acts 17:22, ASV). Evangelists must, pick their battles wisely and carry out their mission strategically (Mat.10:17).

Jesus offered her something more than she had. “Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (John 4:10). It is hard to refuse a gift. Many people come to our assemblies for the first time to see what we have to offer. We will never be able to out give our religious neighbors when it comes to physical gifts, but we do offer something they can’t give. We know Jesus, both the man and His plan!



Many churches of Christ offer a lot of programs. We have meals on wheels, fruit baskets, community meals, benevolent assistance, free yard work, trash pickup, youth activities, college gatherings, child care, disaster relief services, emergency shelters, and so much more,

but do these offers have any connection to the purpose of the church? If all we offer is food for the stomach, then we have become nothing more than a local food bank. If all we offer is help to rebuild a home, then we have become nothing more than another “Habitat for Humanity.” If all we do is provide clothing for the poor, then we have become nothing more than another Goodwill.

We are the church of Christ. Our purpose is,

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11).

If we have a work in the church that is not tied to soul saving, then we need to shut it down until we can refocus it. If it cannot be tied to soul saving, than we need to close it permanently.

Jesus had to point her in the right direction.

“The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?” (John 4:11-12). The offer Jesus made was hard for this woman to understand because she was thinking merely of a physical offer, while Jesus was pointing her toward a spiritual solution. How do you walk someone into a Bible study? You have to build a door. When conversing with the lost, think about how the chosen subject can turn from a mere physical concern to a spiritual discussion. If you are discussing the declining morals in America, perhaps say, “Could I show you something that will solve our moral problems?” This is an indirect invitation to a Bible study!

Jesus did not ignore sins that potentially could close the door. “Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly” (John 4:16-18). How inconsiderate and unloving for someone to bring up sin during a Bible study, but Jesus was not just anybody; He was the Son of God. May I suggest that it takes a lot of love to deal with difficult subjects? An evangelist is not helping someone go to Heaven by ignoring or altering biblical teaching on sin. Salvation requires a discussion of sin just like Heaven requires a discussion of Hell. The subject Jesus addressed was marriage. Those who

suggest we can bring a person to Jesus while ignoring sin are not following their Master.

Jesus emphasized sincerity and truth. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). If you preach the man, you must mention the plan. Bringing a soul to Jesus requires a discussion about the Kingdom (Acts 8:4, 5, 12). Worshipping in Spirit and in Truth is one of many characteristics that differentiate the churches of Christ from the churches of the world. Prospects who are unable to see a difference are not going to change. For example, emphasizing the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week is a simple and powerful point that will set the churches of Christ apart from other religious groups.

Jesus identified the Savior. “Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26). Any Bible study that does not bring the sinner to the cross should be abandoned. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). Jesus is the drawing power of our work. There is no message on earth more powerful and effective to present the lost than the grace of Jesus. We are not just presenting a series of facts to be believed and commands to be obeyed, for the gospel is also full of beautiful promises to be enjoyed.

Jesus used one contact to lead to many others. “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this

the Christ?” (John 4:28-29). One conversion leads to another, and another, and another. How are we going to reverse our four-plus decades of decline in America? One soul at time!

Jesus took advantage of a spiritual opportunity at the cost of physical loss. “In the mean while His disciples prayed Him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore, said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:31-34). Effective personal evangelism takes sacrifice. There have been many times when my family has been tired and worn out, yet we had to get our home ready for a study. The window of opportunity can close quickly. Don’t put off for tomorrow what you must do today. “(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)” (2 Cor. 6:2).

Jesus believed that there are always souls ready for harvest. “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35). There are prospects sitting in our pew, visiting our assemblies, and living in our communities. They live behind the church building and next to our homes. We work with them every day. We don’t have to travel to Africa and India to find a harvest! They are living in our backyard and just need someone willing to teach them.

Jesus saw joy in the future of both the soul winner and the soul won. “And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:36). There is no greater joy on earth than soul winning. It is contagious. If we can just get our members to teach one person, they will be unable to stop.

Jesus recognized that some conversions require time and more than one teacher. “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours” (John 4:37-38).

Jesus rearranged His schedule when souls were at stake. “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word” (John 4:39-41). What is the first thing you discuss in your elders’ meeting? What is the first priority when you walk into your preacher’s office? How many times this year have you talked about non-Christians who sit in your pews Sunday after Sunday? Before we talk about repaving the parking lot, replacing the roof, building a fellowship hall, or painting the auditorium, maybe we should make an appointment to discuss the lost (Mat.28:16).

Jesus knew that one person cannot reach all types of people and that a team is more effective. “And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy

saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). Evangelism is a congregational work where everyone’s talents are needed. Some will be planters while others are cultivators. Some are helpers while others are teachers. The body is made up of many members, and each one has been set by God for the good of the Kingdom. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Cor. 12:18).

Personal evangelists are not politically correct. At times their statements can be confrontational and offensive. They don’t ignore difficult issues and never compromise on truth. They don’t pander to one group of people to the exclusion of another. They never show partiality for the powerful over the poor or the socially elite over the socially awkward. Like Jesus, they are willing to love the lost enough to tell them the truth. Personal evangelists are politically incorrect, just like our Lord.

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Going To Heaven Without A College Degree

Kevin Rutherford



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Time lost will never be found. The past cannot be repeated. You only have one opportunity to raise your children. The influence you have on your children is often strongest in their first five years. It is vitally important that we begin to teach our children about God during those early formative years, and then continue to lay a strong solid foundation of Biblical teaching through the elementary, pre-teen, and teen years. We should teach them about God, His Word, salvation, the church, and the nature of truth. We must show them how to live as compassionate, kind, gentle followers of God. We are required to show them the importance of standing for the truth with love and longsuffering, and we need to verbalize and model Christianity to our children as we are raising them. Failure to do so makes parents complicit in their children's condemnation on

judgment day should their children fail to follow God. Picture in your mind your adult child bowing before the Lord on the day of judgment as your child is condemned to an eternity apart from all that is light, good, pure, holy, Divine, and joyful. Can we describe the anguish, pain, and terror of such a scene? Now picture, your adult child bowing before the Lord on the day of judgment and being invited into the perfection and peace of heaven. Can we describe the overwhelming joy of such a scene? Get it right! Get it right at all costs! Give your everything to the spiritual upbringing of your children! Spare nothing necessary in pointing your children to heaven!

Pointing our children in the direction of heaven must be foremost in our minds as we make educational decisions for them. This includes the decisions we make regarding whether or not they should pursue degrees, what degrees they pursue, which school they attend, and how well they should be grounded in the faith before being sent off to college. There are various degrees that are useful for Christians. There are certain fields in which specific education is necessary. One may still love the Lord and His word, while holding a bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree. But, are we making educational goals for our children that are such that they will kill the faith of our children? Is the Lord going to be checking to see what degree you have before allowing you to enter heaven? Are their degrees of reward in heaven based on how many degrees one has here on earth? It is certainly true that a part of the responsibility of parents is to teach them how to function and live in this world. We

are not saying that all education is sinful and wrong. We are not saying that one cannot be properly prepared to meet the challenges to faith that college education brings. But, we are saying the pursuit of an educational degree must never be first in our lives. Such a pursuit must never be the god of our lives, and such a pursuit must be carefully considered as to its effect upon the souls of our children. What we are saying, is that our children do not need to have a college degree to go to heaven. A sound, solid, foundational, fundamental Scriptural education? Yes! Such an education is needed to help our children look toward heaven, but a college education is not required for entry through heavens gates.

If we make education the god of our home, we will fail our children. We live in a culture that values education. That is only good if the education is good. If the education turns our children away from God, that education is not good. Are we firmly grounding our children in fact, reality, and the truth before we send them off to “Christian” colleges where post-modernism applied to Christianity is running rampant and destroying the souls of so many? Are we preparing our children for the battle they will face in secular schools that are poisoned by the anti-God, anti-Christian fantasies of foolish philosophers? At what cost do we encourage our children to pursue the doctorate degrees in denominational seminaries corrupted by Calvinism? If we are seeking the truth we are not going to the seminaries. The truth is not found there. So why are we going? Why are we sending our children there?

Why do we laud, elevate and praise the doctorate holder who spent years at the feet of false teachers who are condemning souls to hell by the very doctrine they teach? Why do we do this? Are we so puffed up with pride that we cannot understand that a fundamental, textual and contextual study of the Scriptures is far more valuable than any other education one could have?

Jehovah Must Be The God Of Our Homes

If we make anything/anyone but Jehovah the God in our homes we will fail our children. If we teach our children by the way we live, and by what we allow them to do, that other things are more important than God we have smashed a crushing blow to the spiritual well-being of our children. Do we love them? Most surely if we love them we will tell them and show them that God is first. We will model Christianity in every situation and we will fight. We will fight for our own souls, so that we can fight for the souls of our children (1 Pet.5:8-9; Eph. 6:10-18). We will fight our adversary as he seeks to devour our children. We will fight temptation, we will fight worldliness, and we will fight the dark influences of the godless followers of the devil. We will go toe-to-toe and face-to-face with Satan as he comes after our children and we will do our best to defeat him every time. We will not fight to beat the air, but rather to land the blows on Satan's schemes (1 Cor. 9:26). We will fight the wicked forces of spiritual evil that work against our children, and we will teach them how to fight for themselves. Success is joy beyond comprehension. Failure is agony beyond imagination. The war for the

souls of our children is not a war we want to lose. Should Satan win some battles, he must not win the war. Should we fail at times and be defeated, we must get up and fight again, and again, and again (1 John 1:5-10; Heb. 4:14-16)! We must fight with fearless determination in the face of the relentless attacks of the devil (Jam. 4:6-8). May God forgive us for our weaknesses, and may our children rise above our defeats. But, may we diminish the number of failures and fight to save the souls of our children despite our own imperfections. There is no greater fight! This is the war for the souls of our children!

What Is Happening To Our Youth?

With great authority, command, dignity, reverence, and wisdom, the aging Joshua told the Jews,

Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 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. 24:14-15).

With great enthusiasm Israel responded, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey” (Jos. 24:24). These people were true to their word. We are told, “Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who

had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel” (Jos. 24:31). But, something horrible happened when all of that generation passed away. The Bible says, “another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD” (Jud. 2:10-11). Was the generation of Joshua faithful to Jehovah in every way? Is it possible these people could have modeled faithful service to God before their children, and still their children went astray? The text would so indicate. Is it possible these people diligently taught the word of God to their children, and still lost their children (Deu. 6)? Possibly. Surely faithful and diligent parents can lose their children to Satan even in our day and time. But, how likely is it the children would come to know God, love God, and faithfully serve Him if there is no spiritual instruction in the home? Instruction that comes through verbal teaching, and practical modeling of faithful service by the parents is essential. Something went wrong between Joshua’s generation and the one that followed.

Just as something went wrong between Joshua’s generation and the one that followed, something has gone wrong (to a certain degree) between the older generation in the church and the younger generation. Clearly, I am generalizing, because there are a number of tremendous and faithful teenagers and young adults in the church. However, I personally know people in their forties, thirties, and twenties who are questioning their faith, embracing denominationalism, plunging into the post-modern emerging church mindset, dividing the

church, and leading souls astray. Though we must not forget the tremendously faithful teens, and young men and women in the church, we cannot deny the church is struggling with the millennial generation and younger.

The Unintended Consequences Of College Education

This is a complex matter because of the number of factors involved in the apostasy of so many in the younger generations. The title of the lesson as chosen by the Power lectureship director is, “Going to Heaven Without a College Degree.” This points to misplaced priorities by parents, but it also points to one of the reasons we are losing our children. If we send our children to public secular universities we are going to have to spend the first eighteen years of their lives constantly, persistently, tirelessly grounding them in the faith. They must be prepared for the aggressive assault on their faith that will come from universities built upon the philosophical principles of atheism, secularism, humanism, post-modernism, cultural corruption, and neo-Darwinian evolution. If we send our children to Christian universities they will find religious teaching, but in many cases that religious teaching is not Biblical teaching. To be sure, some universities are doing better than others, and have directors on boards that are working hard to maintain the soundness of the school. However, even in such rare cases the student body is often overcome and overwhelmed with the application of post-modernism to Christianity even if the faculty is not. So, you are going to have to firmly warn, prepare, and ground your children before sending them to any

Christian university. What if our children lose their souls because we sent them to college without preparing them? Was the degree worth it? What if their under-graduate and perhaps graduate work lands them a tremendous job that makes them wealthy and comfortable in this life, but they lose their souls because we didn't prepare them for what they were going to face? Is the degree worth the loss of a soul? Is the wealth worth the loss of a soul? Is it worth the loss of the souls of your children and grandchildren?

Consider the emphasis churches of Christ are now placing on advanced degrees earned in denominational seminaries. Denominational seminaries may teach some truth, but they are generally Calvinistic. The doctrines of John Calvin are not such that we can lightly pass over them. They are such matters as directly affect the salvation of souls. The elephant in the room that has so violently crushed the faith of many Christians is the Calvinism that serves as the underlying template, thesis, and philosophy behind most, if not all denominational seminaries. Calvinism is a strong delusion that is causing so many to believe lies. I respect the hard-work people have put into their higher degrees. I respect the talent, dedication, and intelligence of those who have earned higher degrees. I fully understand higher degrees have their uses in certain fields of employment. But, I fail to see how in the world it makes any sense to send our youth off to denominational schools administered by, and taught by false teachers. These are wolves in sheep's clothing. These are those who teach heresies that are causing people to be lost. Surely, in some cases such

professors are kind and sincere in their beliefs and teachings, but wouldn't this make their teaching even more dangerous? Christians have become so caught up in the glorification and elevation of men with higher degrees they have chosen to enter into the den of the devil to be taught the devil's doctrine. Why? Is it because some (not all) want to be considered to be among the scholarly elite? Surely that is vanity and foolishness. Is it because some believe if they have the degrees from the same schools, then elite Calvinist scholars will listen to them, hear the truth, change their ways, repent of their sins, and become Christians? Surely that is highly unlikely. It is most likely your mutual degree will not mean nearly enough to them to cause them to give up their soul-damning error. The Gospel is the power to save, not how many letters a man puts after his name (Rom. 1:16)! How are we helping our youth by sending them to these seminaries?

I am fully confident some seek higher degrees for good, pure, and righteous reasons. I am fully aware that sound and faithful men have trained under the feet of these false teachers, and have remained faithful to the truth. But why would you train at the feet of false teachers? Why not at the feet of sound men in a faithful school of preaching? What not train by diligent, textual and contextual study of the Word of God with a mind to make personal application? Many in the Lord's church have become so caught up in the desire to be like the denominations around them when it comes to education. They want to be considered among the intellectually elite. They want to be called a

“scholar.” They love the cultic comradery of the elites in education who compare themselves by themselves and show themselves to be foolish even as they profess themselves to be wise. Let me give you an example of the kind of foolishness that goes on in elite education circles. Perhaps this event had behind it a genuine, sincere, and humble motivation, but it is an event that should not have occurred. One of our brotherhood schools invited a denominational “scholar” to come and speak to their graduate students. This particular scholar is well-known in his field, and has shown careful, intelligent, and conservative efforts in his writings. Yet, he is a Calvinist. Just as in secular science departments one must be an evolutionist to be considered a part of the scholar club, so in many religious education departments one must be a Calvinist to be considered a true scholar and part of the club. This Calvinist that was invited to speak at the brotherhood school has a website on which he denies the essential nature of baptism, and mocks, with some degree of ridicule, all those who are not scholarly enough to agree with him on that matter. Why is such a man invited to speak to the graduate students in a brotherhood university? Brethren the church needs a good dose of First Corinthians chapters one through three. As long as we continue to send people to denominational seminaries to be trained for higher degrees we are going to see the influence of false doctrine grow within the church, and we are going to continue to see the devil take away more and more of our children. While not all men trained in seminaries have swallowed the lies of their professors, many of them have. Now

some of them are teaching in our Christian colleges and are taking the children away from the church. Why do we do this? When we will get back to training in the true power to save, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16)! The doctrines and commandments of men will make faith and worship vain (Mat. 15:1-9)! Why do we send our youth to be trained by the wolves? What mother sheep sends her lamb to live among the wolves? What shepherd supports a lamb to walk into the wolves' den? Why do you think we are losing so many of our children to the devil?

Young People Are Affected When Adult Christians Misbehave

Our behavior and attitudes are interconnected factors that are involved in the loss of faithfulness among the younger generation today. What we do speaks louder than words. What our children see us do will either cause them to become like us, or it will drive them away from us and the Lord. So many times, our youth have been witness to the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of their parents, and it has hurt them. To be sure, no parent is perfect. Yet there are some parents who are simply not making even a reasonable effort to model proper Christianity before their children. We must show our children by the way we live that Christianity is the whole of our lives (Col. 3:1-17). We are Christians from the inside out (Rom. 2:28-29). We must live our lives in such a way that displays sacrificial dedication to God (Rom. 12:1-2). What do we do for vacations? A vacation to a resort, theme park, campground, etc. is not sinful.

It is such times when the family bonds are strengthened and so such family vacations are encouraged. However, I believe it would go a long way toward helping to strengthen the faith of our children if we made sure their vacation time included events such as sound Bible youth camps, Foundations, and Polishing the Pulpit. What if vacation money is set aside for events that are designed to strengthen the souls of adults and children alike? Wouldn't this help us in raising our children? If we are not showing our children that our lives are centered on God we must not be surprised when they leave God.

There is another problem I have seen in the church that is pushing the younger generation away from God. It is the bad behavior of self-willed men and women in the church. It is the immature, spoiled brat behavior of adults who have been Christians long enough to know better. When elders are self-willed, the teenagers may pick up on that. Teenagers are often sharp and quick. When preachers and youth ministers behave badly teenagers see it. When Christians fight with one another it hurts the faith of the young. When young people read what the Scriptures say about the way Christians are to love each other, and see something completely different in the church it is no wonder they question their faith (1 Cor. 13; 1 John 3-4).

Then again, speaking to the bad behavior of the adult Christians, consider the manner in which we preach and teach the truth. We must always preach and teach without compromise. We must be clear and distinct in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Pet. 4:11; 1 John 2:21). Yet we must teach the

truth to our brethren in love (Eph. 4:15), and we must teach the truth to the lost with gentleness and godly fear (1 Pet. 3:15). To be sure, there are times when a harder approach is necessary (2 Cor. 12:20-21). But we must also remember that most people are going to respond better to an approach characterized by kindness and longsuffering. Paul told the young evangelist to:

avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

Too many times Christians have preached the truth, but have done so with such an arrogance and bitterness that they drive people away. Imagine a violent town sheriff in an old western movie who goes into a room and shoots every living thing in there. He waits till the gun smoke clears to see if anyone is still moving, and if they are he fires off a few more rounds. That's the way some Christians teach the truth. Even when we are right in what we are saying, the manner in which we say it can make so much difference. Christians who speak the truth in bitterness and anger are driving the younger generation away. Speak the truth (2 Tim. 3:13-4:5)! Speak the truth to please God, and don't ever compromise the truth (Gal. 1:6-10)! But please, please, please consider carefully the manner in which you are speaking the truth. Be bold, be clear, be distinct,

and be loving, kind, gentle, and longsuffering. Let us preach what we know to be true (1 John 2:21), but let us preach the glorious and powerful truth with the love that comes from recognizing Jesus died for the ones to whom we are preaching (1 John 4:7-11). When Paul told Timothy to “preach the word,” he told him to do so with longsuffering (2 Tim. 4:2). When our teaching is characterized by ugliness, arrogance, and bitterness we will drive people away (including our children) from God.

It Is The Parent's Responsibility

Dedicated Christian parents are appreciative for any assistance godly, faithful Christian men and women provide as efforts are made to instill a spiritual focus within our children. Sound youth ministers, faithful ministers, dedicated Bible teachers, rock-solid and focused youth camps, scriptural youth conferences and rallies, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ are all appreciated beyond words for their positive influence upon the youth. But, ultimately the responsibility of raising children to know God lies squarely on the shoulders of the parents. If you are a father you will give an account to God for your conduct in your fatherly duties to your children. If you are a mother, you will give an account to God for the way in which you have addressed your motherly responsibilities to your children. Parents, you must raise them. Parents, you must model and teach. Parents, you must exhaust yourself, and sacrifice time, energy, money, and self to raise your children to know and love God. There is

nothing more important you will do in this life. Raising children is no role for selfish people. Your children need your time and your efforts. Your children need God, and they need you to point them to God. You need God, and your children need you. Time lost will never be found. The past cannot be repeated. You only have one opportunity to raise your children.

Joshua's generation was taught to teach. They were to teach their children and their grandchildren. In fact, this command was drilled into the minds of those who lived in Joshua's generation with relentless repetition. Moses commanded Israel, "take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (Deu. 6:9). Here we see the Jews were to model faithfulness and teach faithfulness to their children and grandchildren. Later, Moses said, "lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and... you shall teach them to your children" (Deu. 11:18-19).

Deuteronomy chapter six contains one of the most powerful discussions regarding the teaching of children found in the Scriptures. This section of God's Holy Word begins with an emphasis on obedience to God. Israel was told to "fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life" (Deu. 6:2). God requires the same dedication and obedience to His Word today (Mat.7:21-22; Heb. 5:8-9). Therefore, it is just as important today for us

to teach the commandments of God to our children, and to teach them they must follow those commands. What we are teaching our children is of the greatest of importance. We are teaching them to obey God so that their souls will be saved. We are teaching them to obey God out of a love that involves every aspect of who they are. Moses said, “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” (Deu. 6:5-6). We must show the love of God, and teach the love of God to our children so that they will obey God. We must model a complete and full dedication to God so that our children will know God. True obedience, and humble service to God come from a devoted love that is grounded and implanted in the heart and soul. It is a love that causes us to devote all of our strength to faithful service to God. This is what we must teach our children! Moses said, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deu. 6:6-7).

Beloved brothers and sisters, please listen to me. We must raise our children to know, love, and obey God! The eternal destiny of their souls is at stake. Do we believe that? Do we believe our children will be lost if we don't properly teach them, and in consequence they choose not to follow God? If we believe it, then nothing will stop us from properly training our children to know and model themselves after dedicated men and

women of the Bible. Don't we want our daughters to grow up to be like Hannah who had complete trust in the power of prayer (1 Sam. 1-2)? Read the beautiful prayer of Hannah as recorded in the second chapter of First Samuel. Such spiritual strength and wonderful trust in the Lord and His great power must be what we desire for our daughters. Teach your daughters to be like Elizabeth who faithfully followed the law, Mary who found favor with God, and Tabitha who was known to be full of good works and charitable deeds. Teach your daughters to focus on the inner, "hidden person of the heart" so that they produce within their lives "the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 3:4). Mothers and fathers must show their daughters what the Scriptures say regarding such matters, and mothers must model the beautiful and feminine spiritual characteristics taught in the Scriptures.

Let us teach our sons to be like Moses. Moses was perhaps the greatest national leader the world has ever known. He was a very powerful man because God was with him (Deu. 34:10-12). But despite all of the power and authority he had, Moses is said to have been the meekest, or most humble, of all the men of the earth (Num. 12:3). Teach your sons humble leadership. Humble, humble, humble leadership! Humble! Teach your sons to be like Caleb. At first, he was the only one to stand up for the Lord and oppose the ten faithless spies (Num. 13). The cowardly spies stirred the people to fear, but Caleb quieted the people and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able

to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). God later said, “My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully, I will bring him into the land where he went...” (Num. 14:24). Caleb’s spirit was one of complete trust in God. Caleb’s spirit was one of complete obedience to God. His spirit was one of incredible courage that caused him to stand up for God against an angry nation. Teach your boys to be like that! Teach them even to be like Joshua who later joined Caleb in standing up for the truth. Team them to lead like Joshua with strength and courage even as they keep the Word of God constantly before them (Jos. 1:6-9). Teach your boys to be faithful men of God.

There is so much more to raising our children than simply preparing them to be able to take care of themselves in this material world. The training we give them through college or other education is training that may help them to earn a living, but if that is all we train our children to do we are miserable failures as parents. Miserable! Raise your children with the caution, care, and compassion revealed to Christian parents in the New Testament. Raise your daughters to submit to the Lord and to their husbands (Eph. 5:22-33). Raise your sons to love their wives with all of their being, even as they lead their families (Eph. 5:22-6:4). Parents, teach your children to obey you (Eph. 6:1). This is not an option. This is not an area in which you can afford to fail. If you fail to teach your children to respect your authority it will be very hard for them to understand the importance of respecting the authority of God and His Word (Heb. 12:5-12). Teach them to obey you

because this is inherently right. Even as it is naturally and inherently right for us to obey God because He is the Creator and we are the created, so it is naturally and inherently right for children to obey their parents. Teach them to obey you, and teach them to honor you (Eph. 6:1-3). “Bring them up in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This doesn’t say bring them up with malice and bitter wrath to the know the Lord. This doesn’t say bring them up with fierce, unloving, and dispassionate cruelty. This says, “And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Fathers who are uninvolved in the lives of their children will fail their children. Fathers who are selfish will fail their children. Fathers lacking in Christian qualities and Biblical knowledge will fail their children. Fathers who spoil their children will fail their children. But, fathers who are fierce without mercy, hard without compassion, and strict beyond reason will drive their children to become people of wrath. They will drive their children away from the truth. They will destroy their relationship with their children. They will endanger the souls of their children.

It is no sin for your children to earn college degrees. But, did you know your children can go to heaven without a college degree? Did you know the only thing that really matters in the end is that your children go to heaven? For this reason, we must be diligent to contemplate, absorb, and put into practice the Holy Spirit inspired commands regarding families and children in Colossians 3:18-21. Mothers must

model submission to their husbands, and husbands must model love for their wives. Boys need to learn how to love their wives, and respectfully treat women by the way their father treats his wife. Girls must learn how men should treat women by the example of the father, and of how women should treat their husbands by looking at the example of the mother. Christian men, you must be fully aware of the importance of providing the right example to your sons and daughters through the way you teach your wife. “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (Col.3:19). Don’t be bitter. Show the evidence of your love in the protective, gentle, and kind way you approach your wife. If you are mean-spirited toward your wife, don’t be surprised if your boys grow up to be just like you. How will you feel watching them show hardness and unkindness to their wives? What if your daughter marries a man just like you? Will you be happy with that? If you have lived in bitterness toward your wife, and your daughter marries a man who is bitter toward your daughter, will you be happy?

Paul also teaches us that children must obey their parents in all things (Col. 3:20). Not some things. Not just in what they understand. Not just in what they like. All things! When the kids are persistent the parents must be consistent. When the children in their youthful energy, and curious orneriness push and provoke parents continuously, those parents must work through the fatigue, exhaustion, and weariness to remain consistent. Children must obey their parents in all things, “for this is pleasing to the Lord” (Col. 3:20). But while you

are teaching your children to obey you in all things, remember to be balanced, longsuffering and loving. Remember to teach them to obey without provoking them in such a way that they become discouraged (Col. 3:21). Discipline them to teach them self-discipline, but don't discipline them in such a way that you crush their spirits. The little life-spirit of the ornery, yet beautiful toddler must be kept alive and vibrant even while bringing it under control. Do not be too soft, but by all means do not be too hard on your children.

Men should lead in worship (1 Tim. 2). Not women. Women are given another role. Does this prove women are less spiritual than men? Most certainly not. Does this prove women are less talented, less capable, and less intelligent than men? No. This does show us, among other things, the fact that God has given men and women different works and functions in His church and in the home. How is the home involved in this? God is telling the men to lead in worship (1 Tim. 2:8), and he is telling the women to focus on the children (1 Tim. 2:15). Women please God when they focus on the children. Women will be saved when they focus on children if they will do so with faith, love, holiness, and self-control (1 Tim. 2:15). The secularists, the liberals, and those who have capitulated to current culture will question the fairness of God in this matter. In so doing they display their arrogant and stubborn rebellion toward the will of God. In so doing they display a significant lack of wisdom and understanding in the matter. Think for just a moment concerning the entire theme of this lesson. Is it not to show the importance

of raising children in such a way as to point them in the direction of heaven and save their souls? If this does not happen there will be no men to lead in worship. If this does not happen the church will cease to exist. If this does not happen the next generation will be as faithless as the generation that followed that of Joshua's. If this does not happen our children will be lost! Lost eternally! Lost on the day of judgment! Separated from God! Tell me what could be more important than for a mother to focus on her children with faith, love, holiness, and self-control (1 Tim. 2:8-15; Tit. 2:1-6)!

Stay Focused on Heaven

Encourage your children to ask questions, and express doubts. Be ready to give them an answer with meekness, fear, and love. Be alert to what is going on in their schools, and in our society. Head off the devil before he can savagely shred the souls of your dear ones. Know what is going on, and teach your children the truth. But do so with love, kindness, patience, longsuffering, and compassion, balanced out with admonition, chastening, and discipline. Then top it all off with dedication and devotion to your children.

I do not stand before you as a perfect father. I do not stand before you as one who has all the answers to every one of life's complex situations involving children. I stand before you well aware of my own weaknesses. Yet, by the grace of God and to His glory my children love Him, and faithfully serve Him. The thought of them leaving God scares me, and I know that Satan will always be after them, even as he is after me. Should I

lose any of my children to the devil I will die inside. My heart will be crushed. Oh, may it never happen! I hope I have taught my children to fight this spiritual war. I hope I have taught them to get up when they fall, so that they may fight again. I hope my children know the grace and mercy of God that will allow them to always come back to Him should they fall (1 John 1:5-2:1; Heb. 4:14-16). There is nothing I want more than to see my family in heaven. Nothing. Nothing is more important. Not the elite status of higher educational degrees. Not all the money in the world. Not power and influence. Not the glory of men. Not any of the vain and foolish, self-centered egotistical pursuits that even many of our preachers are entangled with. All of those things are rubbish. They are all garbage. They are all foolishness. I pray that no such things will hinder me or my family from going to heaven. I pray that no such matters have hurt my work in raising my children. God loves you, and He loves your children. I know that you love your children also. Time lost will never be found. The past cannot be repeated. You only have one opportunity to raise your children. Please stay focused on heaven and teach your children to do the same. To God be the glory forever and ever!

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All Scripture Quotations are taken from the *New King James Version*, Thomas Nelson, Inc, Nashville, 1982

Animals Are People Too? The Animal Rights Movement

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On January 31, 2000, Ray Lewis, at that time a star linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens, was involved in an incident which resulted in the stabbing deaths of Jacinth Baker and Richard Lollar (Wikipedia.org, “Ray Lewis). Lewis, whose white suit from that evening was never found, was arrested and charged with murder and aggravated assault. He reached a plea agreement with the Fulton County, Georgia District Attorney, and was given 12 months’ probation and fined \$250,000 by the NFL (ibid). He went on the next year to win Super Bowl MVP, and played 12 seasons after the incident (ibid). Ray Lewis has since enjoyed a career as a television analyst and personality, despite a widespread belief that he committed, or at least had heavy involvement in, the two murders (Schrotenboer).

In contrast, Michael Vick, an electric NFL quarterback who began his career with the Atlanta Falcons, saw his career derailed and nearly destroyed by

a conviction for dogfighting in 2007 (Wikipedia.org, “Michael Vick”). He served 21 months in prison, and upon his release, the media and public backlash was so strong that Vick would not play football again until 2009 (ibid). During this hiatus, the Canadian Football League refused to hire him, and only through repeated acts of contrition and penance did he finally get another shot with the Philadelphia Eagles (ibid).

Why begin a study on animal rights with these two stories? The contrast between these two events—particularly the media and public reactions to them—underscore a disturbing trend in our culture: the lives of animals are often deemed more valuable than those of humans. Ray Lewis is widely believed to have committed murder, yet he has enjoyed great success. Michael Vick engaged in dogfighting and animal abuse—both horrible in their own right—and was treated as a social pariah.

How did society reach a point where animal life is seen by some as more precious than human life? As this study will show, there has been a concerted effort on the part of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and organizations like it to elevate animals to the level of mankind. At the same time, evolutionary science has devalued mankind (an assertion which is easily proven but beyond the scope of this study), leaving the human race in the precarious position it seems to be in now. Therefore, it will take a proper Biblical understanding to read just this imbalance. In particular, approaching the relationship between animals and man from a Biblical perspective will underscore the

differences between humankind and animals. As well, a Biblical review of several connected issues will aid understanding of the issue of animal rights.

The ANIMAL/MAN RELATIONSHIP

The Animal Rights' Perspective

The primary divide between the animal rights movement and God's intended view of the world stands between each group's view of the relationship between animals and mankind. To those entrenched in the far depths of animal rights, animals and man stand on equal footing. To quote Ingrid Newkirk, founder of PETA: "When it comes to pain, love, joy, loneliness, and fear, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. Each one values his or her life and fights the knife" ("Why Animal Rights?"). Proponents of such a view have coined a new term: "speciesism." The term is defined on PETA's official website:

"Speciesism" is the human-held belief that all other animal species are inferior. Speciesist thinking involves considering nonhuman animals—who have their own desires, needs, and complex lives—as means to human ends. This supremacist line of "reasoning" is used to defend treating other living, feeling beings as property, objects, or even ingredients. It's a bias rooted in denying others their own agency, interests, and self-worth, often for personal gain ("What is speciesism?").

One may note some interesting turns-of-phrase in this definition. First, humans are mentioned in relation to "all **other** animal species," implying that humans are

but another species in the animal kingdom. Second, the term “supremacist” is used to describe those who see a distinction between animals and mankind, a word that conjures up ideas of Nazism and other forms of prejudice and bigotry. To PETA and its kindred, those who draw a line between animals and humans are bigoted elitists, artificially building up the human race as a superior race among the other animals. In fact, the summary statement of PETA claims as much, as it states, “Whether it’s based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or species, prejudice is morally unacceptable” (“Why animal rights?” emphasis added). With such a view, it is no wonder that PETA and its adherents are against any treatment of animals as inferior, whether as pets, food, clothing, test subjects or entertainment.

But such a stance becomes even more disturbing when taken to a farther extreme. As mentioned earlier, there are many who have grown to value animal life more than human life. To illustrate this point, one need look no further than PETA’s stance on abortion. The organization claims to “not have a position on the abortion issue, because our focus as an organization is the alleviation of the suffering inflicted on nonhuman animals” (“What is PETA’s Stance on Abortion?”). However, the group makes clear that it is “pro-animal,” not “pro-unborn human,” in instances such as the one that took place in Madison, Wisconsin in 2011. Proudly promoted on PETA’s website are protestors standing outside the Dane County courthouse. Inside was a hearing for a man accused of planning to shoot a doctor at a Madison Planned Parenthood clinic (Sherrow).

The article argues, “The meat and dairy industries are responsible for the suffering and deaths of billions of babies every year” (ibid). The author goes on to describe the poultry industry, claiming that “chickens raised for meat are only 7 weeks old when they are killed” (ibid). Clearly, PETA is using an event supposedly connected to the pro-life movement (though true followers of God would never advocate murder) to further their views on animal rights. But the boldest—and most disturbing—statement is the closing statement in the article: “And since animals don’t get to choose whether they will be abused and slaughtered, this is one issue that pro-lifers and pro-choicers should be able to agree on” (ibid). Essentially, the author is claiming that pro-life and pro-choice are merely “issues” about which reasonable people can disagree, whereas animal rights is a truth upon which all must agree.

The Biblical Perspective

The Bible is clear on the relationship between animals and mankind. As the Godhead discussed creating man, 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” (Gen. 1:26). First, it is important to notice the pattern used to create mankind. The phrases “in Our image” and “the image of God” (Gen.1:28) are certainly difficult to fully understand. Keil and Delitzsch unpack this phrase well in the following description:

There is more difficulty in deciding in what the likeness to God consisted. Certainly not in the bodily form, the upright position, or commanding aspect of the man, since God has no bodily form, and the man's body was formed from the dust of the ground; nor in the dominion of man over nature, for this is unquestionably ascribed to man simply as the consequence or effluence of his likeness to God. Man is the image of God by virtue of his spiritual nature, of the breath of God by which the being, formed from the dust of the earth, became a living soul (39).

“In the image of God” is a descriptive phrase reserved only for mankind, and it encompasses all that separates man from animals.

Second, described in Genesis 1:26 is the **authority** delegated to mankind. He is to have “dominion,” a word that literally means “to tread down” and is variously translated “rule,” “reign” and “prevail against” (Wilson 132). Note also the **scope** of this authority: fish, fowl, cattle and “creeping thing”—in summation, “all the earth.” Two verses later, God underscored this idea by giving mankind dominion over “every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Thus, God placed man over all of His creation, including the animals. This idea is forcefully reiterated in Psalm 8, where David praised God for giving man “dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet” (Psa. 8:4-8).

The Issue Of Sentience

The thread that runs through nearly the entirety of the above discussion is the issue of sentience, and

this issue is of such importance that it will be addressed separately. “Sentience” is defined in the following two ways:

1. A sentient state or quality; capacity for feeling or perceiving; consciousness; or
2. mere awareness or sensation that does not involve thought or perception (Neufeldt 1223).

It is in the murky waters of these definitions that the questions lie. Is sentience the ability to be conscious of one’s existence? Or is it merely the capacity to feel? Are animals conscious beings? What about human fetuses? Are they conscious? Does it matter? For many, the issue of sentience tips the scales of their view of animal rights and—for some at least—the value of all life, even human.

Many in the scientific community treat the issue of animal sentience as a settled fact. Marc Bekoff, PhD, wrote an article for *Psychology Today* entitled, “Scientists Conclude Nonhuman Animals Are Conscious Beings” (“Scientists”). But notice the subtitle: “Didn’t we already know this? Yes, we did” (*ibid*). The author went on to quip, “I honestly thought it was a joke, likely from one of my favorite newspapers, *The Onion*” (note: *The Onion* is a sarcastic site that publishes made-up articles to satire current news and events). This article and another one on the same subject focus on the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness (Bekoff, “A Universal”), stating:

Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysical substrates of

conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.

The research that culminated in this statement also led to the following statement in The Treaty of Lisbon, passed by the European Union in 2009: "...the Union and the Member States shall, **since animals are sentient beings**, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals..." (ibid, emphasis added). To Bekoff, the members of the Union who drafted the above statement, and myriad others like them, animal sentience is assumed, and therefore the world should stop allowing animals to be "used and abused for research, education, food, clothing, and entertainment" (ibid).

But are animals sentient? As was alluded to before, it depends on the definition of "sentience" and its related word "consciousness." As one author puts it, "One way to approach the problem is to define consciousness with the broadest possible stroke and in the simplest conceivable terms" (Harrub). Proponents of animal sentience share the view of several scientists mentioned in the article above: to them, prerequisites to consciousness are merely "the capacity to have experiences" or "that they sometimes feel" (ibid). But surely such a broad definition of consciousness is lacking. In reality, the dividing line between animals and mankind is the ability to be self-aware. As Brad

Harrub explained it:

Robert Ornstein, in his book, *The Evolution of Consciousness*, noted: “Being conscious is being aware of being aware. It is one step removed from the raw experience of seeing, smelling, acting, moving, and reaction.” That “one step” is a mighty big step, however! The difference between merely “being aware” (i.e., “just having experiences” or “simply feeling”) and actually being “self-aware” (i.e., knowing that you are having experiences, and knowing that you are feeling) is colossal...” (ibid).

The ability to be self-aware is best seen in a being’s approach to death. Harrub quotes Theodosius Dobzhansky as saying, “Self-awareness has, however, brought in its train of somber companions—fear, anxiety and death awareness...Man is burdened by death-awareness...” (ibid). And interestingly, only man exhibits any significant form of death-awareness. The chimpanzee, supposedly man’s closest ancestor according to evolutionary theory, exhibits no such awareness of death, either by demonstrating a knowledge of its own mortality or by ritually disposing of its dead (ibid).

In reality, a reference back to Genesis 1:26-28 should silence the entire debate on sentience. Being formed “in the image of God” underscores the gift given only to mankind: a soul. It is that soul that provides man’s sentience, his consciousness. And it is that soul which animals lack—no matter what other attributes of consciousness they may demonstrate. For mankind—and for mankind alone—did God “breathe into his nostrils the breath of life” so that “man became

a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Though a similar phrase is used in Genesis 7:22, there is never any intimation in Scripture that animals are given an immortal soul. When describing the Hebrew words variously used to describe the life force of God’s creation, Keil and Delitzsch observed:

The beasts arose at the creative word of God, and no communication of the spirit is mentioned even in Genesis 2:19; the origin of their soul was coincident with that of their corporeality, and their life was merely the individualization of the universal life, with which all matter was filled in the beginning by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, the human spirit is not a mere individualization of the divine breath which breathed upon the material of the world, or of the universal spirit of nature; nor is his body merely a production of the earth when stimulated by the creative word of God. The earth does not bring forth his body, but God Himself puts His hand to the work and forms him; nor does the life already imparted to the world by the Spirit of God individualize itself in him, but God breathes directly into the nostrils of the one man, in the whole fulness of His personality, the breath of life, that in a manner corresponding to the personality of God he may become a living soul (Keil 50).

As well, Paul recognized the difference between animals and mankind when he penned by inspiration, “**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” (1 Cor. 15:39).

Observing and respecting this dividing line

between animals and man—that only man is truly self-aware, and only man has a soul—must necessarily color our understanding of the ultimate value of human life. At the very spark of life—at conception—a human fetus is given a soul (cf. Jer. 1:5), just as it is at the moment of death that the soul leaves the body (Gen. 35:18). Concerning abortion, one author explained, “Opposition to ending a pregnancy, even in its earliest stages, rests on the view that the **humanity of a zygote, embryo, or fetus make all the difference**” (Colb, emphasis added). That **humanity** comes from mankind’s possession of a soul, and it is a unique quality that gives mankind a value that no animal can possess. Thus, murdering an unborn baby via abortion is not equivalent to euthanizing an animal for whom no home can be found. It is not on par with raising cattle for food, killing an animal for clothing, or using an animal for entertainment. In Genesis 9:3-6, God gave mankind permission to use “every moving thing that liveth” as “meat for you,” thereby underscoring the earthly hierarchy on the top of which he—mankind—presides. He then gave this sober condemnation: “Whoso sheddeth **man’s blood**, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.” With certainty, then, God forever puts to rest the idea that animals are on equal footing with man on this earth.

VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO ANIMAL RIGHTS

There is a wealth of evidence proving the differences between animals and mankind. God gave mankind the gift of a soul, and by making him “in His image,” God

also gave the gift of true sentience. These gifts mean humans have an inherent value that surpasses that of other parts of God's creation.

Mankind's Obligation To The Animal World

Despite the plainness of the above points, some questions may persist. For instance, some may wonder just what mankind's responsibility to the animal world may be. Thus, a deeper study of man's obligations to the material world is in order. In Genesis 2, God is described as putting Adam "into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). The word "dress" indicates labor or work, to serve or enslave (Strong 466); "keep" carries with it the idea of "guard; generally to protect, attend to, etc." (ibid 541). As one commentator stated,

As nature was created for man, it was his vocation not only to ennoble it by his work, to make it subservient to himself, but also to raise it into the sphere of the spirit and further its glorification. This applied not merely to the soil beyond the limits of paradise, but to the garden itself, which, although the most perfect portion of the terrestrial creation, was nevertheless susceptible of development, and which was allotted to man, in order that by his care and culture he might make it into a transparent mirror of the glory of the Creator (Keil 52-53).

Humanity was created to be the protector, the guard of God's creation. This requires that man respect and value every part of that creation, from the physical world he inhabits to the life that surrounds him. Of course, some take this responsibility too far, as evidenced

by the above-mentioned stances of PETA, as well as the militant proponents of extreme environmental initiatives, which there is not space here to discuss. But perhaps a worthy representation of the moderate position of human responsibility to nature can be found in the philosophies of the ASPCA (the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). On its official website, the ASPCA lists the “Five Freedoms” it believes should be protected for all life:

1. **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.

2. **Freedom from Discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

3. **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4. **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind.

5. **Freedom from Fear and Distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering (“Guiding Principles,” emphasis added).

The agency advocates for a common-sense and responsible application of these principles. Unlike PETA, the ASPCA believes that animals can be pets, but it advocates for “responsible guardianship,” which it defines as “legal adults who are fully committed to humane, compassionate, lifelong care for their companion animal(s)” (“Definition of Responsible Guardian”). The ASPCA does not condemn the farming

and processing of animals for food or clothing, but believes that “farm animal suffering can be reduced through more humane farming methods and through welfare-conscious and reduced animal product consumption” (“Farm Animals”). To be sure, there are aspects of even the ASPCA’s positions that seem too restrictive to this author, but compared to the extremes of PETA, the former organization more accurately represents God’s view of the animal/man relationship.

Dietary Restrictions Related To The Animal Rights Movement

Any discussion of animal rights will inevitably raise questions about dietary restrictions. Central to PETA’s platform is the condemnation of all eating of meat. They claim that “there is significant evidence that we [humans] are better suited to a vegetarian diet” (“Aren’t humans natural carnivores?”). As well, PETA alleges, “...humans are capable of making ethical decisions. We can get all the nutrients we need from plant sources, which means that billions of animals are unnecessarily slaughtered every year at the expense of our health and the environment” (ibid). With such bold claims, and considering the growing popularity of diets related to veganism and vegetarianism, what does the Bible teach about mankind’s diet? And what expectations should we have regarding the production of meat products?

It is interesting to note that mankind has not always been carnivorous. Each of the first three chapters in Genesis make this clear. In Genesis 1:29-30, God makes this sweeping declaration:

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

It is obvious that this passage grants mankind the right to eat only vegetation. It also appears that God's animal creation was to only eat vegetation, as well. Jim Stambaugh writes, "according to Genesis 1:29–30, God originally created men and animals to be plant eaters" ("Creations Original Diet"). Interestingly, Stambaugh breaks down the several Hebrew words relating to plants in this passage. The Hebrew word "eseb" indicates vegetation in general; it is qualified by the Hebrew word "zera" for "seed" (ibid). The indication is that mankind was to eat that vegetation which produced seeds. As well, God authorized him to eat "every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed," with "fruit" being a translation of the Hebrew word "peri" and signifying "something that grows on a tree or vine" (ibid).

Another iteration of this command is found in Genesis 2:16-17. There, God commanded, "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." No mention is made of eating meat; rather, permission is given to eat "of every tree of the garden" except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Again, after Adam and Eve's sin, God condemned each culprit,

saying to Adam, “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:18-19).

However, God’s dietary legislation would change after the flood. Genesis 9:3-4 records, “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.” Several things are noteworthy in this passage. First, there are no restrictions given yet for clean or unclean animals. While that distinction had been drawn on the ark (likely for sacrificial purposes, cf. Gen. 7:2), it would not be made relative to diet until the Law of Moses. Second, man was forbidden from eating flesh “with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof.” While this would certainly be a safe practice from a health standpoint, God’s primary purpose is stated in the text with the phrase “with the life thereof.” Leviticus 17:11 would expound upon this principle, stating, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.”

There is a movement today by some towards veganism (abstaining from all animal products, including eggs and dairy products) or vegetarianism (abstaining from meat). While it should be clear that such dietary decisions should not be made on the basis

of animal equality to man, there are some who advocate a diet like that of Adam and Eve. One man, George Malkmus, has developed what he calls “the Hallelujah Diet” (Bury). Malkmus is described as “pound[ing] the pulpit: ‘What did God tell man in Genesis 1:29? That your food shall be all of those plants that are in that garden. You will not find anything of animal origin in the garden diet. You will not find Twinkies, either!’” (ibid). He even goes on to dismiss the dietary change in Genesis 9:3 by claiming “that section of Genesis refers only to the time of the great flood, when those aboard Noah’s ark had to eat animal flesh” (ibid). Of course, this assertion has no textual evidence and smacks of a man more interested in selling t-shirts and books than properly interpreting God’s word.

Fad diets notwithstanding, there is a growing wealth of evidence that diets too dependent on meat can lead to health problems. According to the MD Anderson Cancer Center, “Eating too much meat—especially too much processed meat—can increase your risk for certain types of cancers, including colon cancer and esophageal cancer” (Blackburn). Guidelines published by the American Institute for Cancer Research indicate that “two-thirds or more of your plate should be plant-based foods” (ibid). However, there are no Biblical commands forbidding people today from eating meat. In fact, God’s command to Peter to “Rise, kill and eat” (Acts 10:13)—a once-for-all statement about the end of Mosaic dietary restrictions—effectively opened the door for all types of meat to be eaten. For those who

feel strongly about one particular diet or another, Paul's words to the Romans should serve as adequate caution:

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him (Rom. 14:1-3).

CONCLUSION

At creation, God made man in His image, providing for him an eternal soul and the awareness of his own mortality. He provided for him a world, populated by animals and plants, and made mankind the guardian and caretaker of that world. Sadly, many today seek to “worship and serve the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25), with some even placing on the animal creation more value than on man himself. To the Bible student, however, it is clear that man is the crown of God's creation, and that he is worthy of the consideration and value that is befitting a being in whom God breathed “the breath of life.”

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Understanding Islam

Rod Rutherford



Rod is married to Brenda for fifty-six years and together they have two sons and a daughter. They have eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Rod has been preaching for the past fifty-nine years. He and Brenda have been missionaries in Zambia (Africa) and Tasmania (Australia). They have worked for 15 years with *Truth for the World* and have made many mission trips of a few weeks duration to various parts of the world. In addition, Rod has served congregations in Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia and Florida as preacher or elder. His last work was with the church in Gatlinburg for eleven years. In addition, he has taught in several schools of preaching including Memphis, East Tennessee and Florida.

Americans generally knew very little about Islam before the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. After the initial shock and the flurry of patriotism which followed had subsided, a number of prominent politicians and the liberal media began a campaign to persuade the general public that what had happened was not typical of Islam, but merely an aberration. In fact, it was repeated constantly that “Islam is a perfectly peaceful religion that has been hijacked by a handful of extremists who carried out the murderous and unprovoked attacks.”

In the light of this campaign, please consider the following facts of recent history and ask yourself what these facts have in common:

1. The 1968 assassination of Robert Kennedy, Attorney General of the United States and a candidate for the presidency.

2. The kidnapping and murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the Olympics in Munich, Germany in 1972.

3. The murder of thirty-three passengers on Pan American flight 707 at the international airport in Rome, Italy in 1973.

4. The 1979 takeover of the American Embassy in Teheran, Iran and the holding of sixty American citizens hostage for four hundred and forty-four days.

5. The 1983 bombing of the United States Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon which killed two hundred, ninety-nine American and French peacekeepers sent by the United Nations.

6. The hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise ship in the Mediterranean in 1985 and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, an elderly Jewish-American invalid in a wheelchair.

7. The 1987 hijacking of TWA flight 847 at Athens, Greece and the murder of an American naval officer who happened to be on board.

8. The 1988 bombing of Pan American flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland which killed every one of the two hundred, seventy-nine passengers and crew.

9. The attempted bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City in 1993 in which seven people died.

10. The 1988 bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania which resulted in two hundred deaths and hundreds of injuries.

11. The September 11, 2001 hijacking of four American airliners with the passengers and crew, the use of two of the planes to destroy the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the crash of the third plane over Shanksville, Pennsylvania when the passengers tried to take it back from the hijackers, and the crash of the fourth plane into the Pentagon in Washington DC killing all on board as well as many others on the ground. In all, more than three thousand died on that infamous day!

12. The 2002 kidnapping and subsequent beheading of Danny Pearl, a Jewish-American journalist who was in Pakistan on his way to an arranged meeting with Sheik Mubarak Al-Gilani, founder of Islamic military training camps in the United States and elsewhere.

13. The 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon which killed four people including a small child and injuring two hundred, sixty-four others.

14. The murder of thirteen innocent people attending a Christmas party at work in San Bernardino, California, the murder of forty-nine people in a night club in Orlando, Florida, and hundreds killed in terrorist attacks in London, England; Madrid, Spain; Brussels, Belgium; and Nice and Paris, France.

These evil attacks on innocent people have one thing in common: **they were all carried out by Muslims who believed they were serving their god, Allah, in a holy war to advance Islam!** Is Islam a peaceful religion? One has to deny the obvious to think so! The simple fact of the matter is that Islam's

holy book, the *Quran*, contains numerous commands to make war on all who do not accept Islam. We shall note a few examples of many which could be cited.

First, please note that Muslims are commanded to make war on Jews and Christians.

Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given as believe in neither Allah nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and his prophets have forbidden and do not obey the true faith, until they pay tribute out of hand, and are utterly subdued. The Jews say Ezra is the son of Allah while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of Allah. **Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. Allah confound them! How perverse they are!** (*The Koran: Penguin Classics*: Sura 9:29,30).

The Quran also commands that war must be made on all, not only Jews and Christians who do not submit to Islam:

...if they keep away from you and cease their hostility and offer you peace, Allah forbids you to harm them... If these do not keep their distance from you, if they neither offer you peace nor cease their hostilities against you, **lay hold of them and kill them wherever you find them.** Over such we give you absolute authority (*The Koran: Penguin Classics*: Sura 4:90-91).

The Quran especially singles out idolators as objects of Allah's wrath. They are therefore deemed worthy of having their blood shed.

Slay them wherever you find them! Drive them out of the place from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed. But do not fight them within the sacred precincts of the mosque unless they attack you there; if they attack you there, put them to the sword. Thus shall the unbeliever be rewarded; but if they mend their ways, know that Allah is forgiving and merciful (The Koran: Penguin Classics: Sura 2:192).

“But,” someone will ask, “What about the peaceful passages in the Quran? Are there not passages also which speak of no one being forced to accept Islam?” The answer is “Yes, indeed! There are such passages!” How do Muslims explain such obvious contradictions? The answer is that the many contradictions in the Quran are resolved by the principle of “nasikh.” This is the law of abrogation. This principle simply says that if one passage contradicts another, the passage which was revealed last stands and the earlier passage is abrogated or cancelled out (Gabriel 45-49).

In the early days of Islam before he and his followers were forced to flee from Mecca, Muhammad sought to win converts to his newly founded faith by preaching and persuasion. Passages such as Sura 2:256 which says, “There is no compulsion in religion” belong to this era as do other passages enjoining peace. However, things changed after Muhammad and his fellow Muslims fled to Medina to escape persecution. After a time they began to be in want. They had left behind their homes, businesses and other property and had no way to sustain themselves. Muhammad decided to fill this need by attacking and plundering the rich caravans on their way

to Mecca. Muhammad's raiders proved successful in this undertaking and were soon joined by other Bedouins who loved to wage war and raid neighboring tribes. He soon had a substantial army under his command.

Muhammad's first major battle was at Badr. He and about three hundred men attacked a caravan which was accompanied by a force of nearly one thousand. The Muslims triumphed over the larger force, but while they fought, the caravan fled so they failed to take away the spoils of war. They had, however, captured a number of the enemy force and set about slaughtering them. Someone suggested that it would be more profitable if they held their captives for ransom, which they did, and so made a little profit out of their effort (Spencer 103-109).

At the beginning of his efforts to convert others to Islam, Muhammad had been very friendly to the fairly large Jewish population in the towns and cities of Arabia. He attempted to convince them that Allah was the same as Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament. He borrowed heavily from Jewish writings, especially the Talmud, Midrash, and the Targum (Miller 74-78). This accounts for the fact that the Quran's recounting of Old Testament events differs widely from that found in the Bible, but bear a much closer resemblance to the garbled accounts of the Jewish non-canonical books which were well known in Arabia among the Jews who lived there. Muhammad had even told his followers that they must prostrate themselves in the direction of Jerusalem in their daily prayers. He changed the direction toward which prayers must be made later when the Jews refused

to acknowledge him as a prophet (Spencer 101).

When the Jews no longer were willing to listen to Muhammad, he began to turn against them. The passages in the Quran which speak of the Jews as “children of pigs and apes” belong to the period of the Jews’ rejection of Muhammad’s claims (Gabriel: Sura 5:60).

It was not long before Muhammad’s changed attitude toward the Jews resulted in violence. Muhammad determined to rid Arabia of all Jews. The Qurayzah tribe had a village not far from Medina. This village was attacked and besieged for twenty-five days until the people surrendered. Muhammad commanded that trenches be dug in the marketplace in Medina. The group of eight hundred to nine hundred Jewish men who had surrendered to the Muslims were marched to the marketplace, beheaded, and buried in the trenches. Following this, the wives and children of the murdered men were then auctioned as slaves (Gabriel 110-112).

Muhammed personally participated in twenty-seven battles. In eighteen battles, he directed events from behind the lines. In nine he himself fought as a warrior. It is not surprising that the words “fight” and “kill” are found more frequently in the Quran than the word “pray” (Shipp 97-98). By the time of Muhammad’s death in 632, he and his army had brought the entire Arabian Peninsula under Islamic control. Within one hundred years after his death, Islamic armies had carved out a vast empire that extended from India in the east to Spain in the west (Rutherford 51). The Muslim advance

into Europe was stopped dead in its tracks in a great battle at Tours {Poitiers} in France in 732 (Stewart 55). A large Islamic force marched from Spain into France but was met by the French army under Charles Martel and soundly defeated and driven back into Spain. Muslims continued to control much of Spain and Portugal until driven out by the combined forces of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 (Rutherford).

Those who were captured by the armies of Islam were given one of three choices: (1) They could convert to Islam; (2) They could pay the “jizya,” an exorbitant tax required of “dhimmis” (non-Muslims in an Islamic nation); (3) If they chose neither of the first two, they were beheaded and their families were sold into slavery (Pike 41-44).

Sadly, many “converted” to Islam because it was the easiest and “safest” thing to do. The areas of the Middle East, Southern Europe and North Africa where Christianity began and had its greatest early growth and strength are strongholds of Islam today. If it could happen before, it can happen again! Islam is rapidly gaining ground in both Western Europe and North America! May we wake up before it is too late!

To borrow the title of a popular novel of a few years ago, Islam is “a clear and present danger!” The imminent danger of this rapidly growing and evil religion can be seen in the growing number of military training camps Muslims are running in the United States. These training camps are operated with the full knowledge of our local and state police, Department of Homeland Security

and Federal Bureau of Investigation, yet nothing is done about them. They have been exposed in local newspapers such as The Bradley County News in Cleveland, Tennessee and by organizations such as Christian Action who have DVDs available showing these camps. When asked about them, officials simply say they are aware of them and “watching them.”

There are thirty-five known camps in the United States. They stretch across the nation from the East to the West Coast. There are three in Tennessee. They are located along the northern border with Kentucky at Dover and Paris. They are not far from the Fort Campbell Army base in Kentucky nor from Interstate 24. A third camp is located in Bedford County near Shelbyville. All are within about an hour's drive or less from Nashville (Bradley County News 2-15-15).

The camps are usually located in rugged, wooded, rural areas. Many of the people training in the camps are ex-convicts who served time for violent crimes and were converted to Islam while in prison. They identify themselves as “Muslims of America” or “Soldiers of Islam.” They are known to engage in paramilitary training including weapons use, explosives, kidnapping and the techniques of guerrilla warfare. The question is why? Why are they doing such training? Obviously, they have in mind some kind of military action or possible takeover of our government. Christians need to write or call the governor of their state and their representatives in the state legislatures, ask them if they are aware of these camps, and demand that action be taken to close

them immediately!

The leadership of these Muslim training camps has been traced to an Islamic organization in Pakistan called Jamaat al-Fukra. The head of Jamaat al-Fukra is Sheik Mubarak al-Gilani who is known to have ties to various terrorist groups (Christian Action DVD). Danny Pearl, the Jewish-American journalist who was kidnapped and beheaded in Pakistan, was on his way to a pre-arranged interview with al-Gilani when he was captured and killed.

Dr. Mark Gabriel, a former Muslim who grew up in Egypt and taught Islamic History and Culture at Al-Azhar University, the oldest and most prestigious school of higher learning in the Islamic world, says there are three stages of a nation being conquered by Islam. **The first stage** is “The Weakened Stage.” In this stage Muslims are a small minority. They live quietly, obey the laws of the land, and slowly work to increase their numbers and influence. **The second state** is “The Preparation Stage.” By the time of this stage, Muslims have grown greatly in numbers, wealth and influence. They are well represented in the most prestigious professions such as law, medicine and teaching. They run successful businesses. They run for higher office and become influential in state and federal government. They prepare financially and militarily and wait for the opportune time to take over. **The third stage** of Jihad occurs when Muslims are rich, powerful, and influential. They have become well accepted in the community.

They are now ready to move to take power. If

they can do it peacefully, they will. If not, they will not hesitate to use military means (Gabriel 85-87). It is this writer's conviction that America is now entering the second stage of Jihad. It is not too late to stop it if we will wake up, become informed and involved!

To be prepared to oppose Islam, one must know Islam. This requires reading and study. There are many excellent books on the subject available today. I prefer the books which have been written by former Muslims for they know Islam from the "inside out" and have an understanding of it that few of us have. I strongly recommend the book *Unveiling Islam* by Ergun and Emir Caner. These two brothers grew up in Islam but became believers in Jesus as the Son of God in their late teenage years. Both men are highly educated and are university professors. I also strongly recommend any of the half dozen books written by Dr. Mark A. Gabriel, a former professor of Islamic History at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. His first book, *Islam and Terrorism*, is simple and spellbinding reading and gives a good overview of Islam as well as insight into present day Islamic terrorism. One should also have a copy of the *Quran* and make an effort to read it although it is difficult reading. To begin with, I recommend the *Quran* in modern English translated by N. J. Dawood which is published by Penguin books. It is called "*The Koran: Penguin Books*." It is much easier reading than a traditional Quran with old style English ecclesiastical phraseology. Other books that I recommend are those written by Brigitte Gabriel (no relation to

Mark Gabriel). Ms. Gabriel grew up in Lebanon. As a child, she and her family were displaced during the civil war in the early 1980's when the minority Muslim population sought to wrest power from the majority. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Ms. Gabriel realized what had happened in her homeland could also happen in the USA. Therefore, she formed an organization called *Act for America* which seeks to warn and educate Americans of the dangers of Islam and their aim for world domination. Her latest book, *Rise in Defense of Judeo-Christian Values and Freedom* is provocative and informative. I highly recommend it. All of these books are available on Amazon. Used copies are often available at very low prices.

It is my considered opinion that no greater danger faces our faith and our freedom than Islam! It is dangerous, destructive and deceptive! It is well advanced already. Three members of the current Congress of the United States are Muslims who were sworn in on the Quran, rather than on the Bible as had been done since the beginning of our republic. Many important positions in our government are now held by Muslims. Large Muslim populations are present in several metropolitan areas such as Detroit, Michigan and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Council of American-Islamic Relations (C.A.I.R.) based in the Washington DC area has tremendous influence on our federal government and the decisions it makes regarding our dealings with Islam. Our children and grandchildren may not enjoy the benefits of a free nation where they can openly practice their faith in Christ if Islam is

allowed to prevail.

It is past time that we as Christians wake up and confront the challenge of Islam! We must not let our biased, liberal media, complacent and self-serving politicians and the blind toleration of any bizarre, different or dangerous blend of politics and religion make us afraid to stand up, speak up and speak out against Islam and any other false ideology!

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Love, Honor And Obey: The Head Of The Woman Is The Man

Jack Honeycutt



Jack is married to the former Becky Judd. They have two grown children, Heather and Heath, and seven grandchildren. Jack graduated from the Nashville School of Preaching in 1987 and earned his Bachelor of Ministry from Theological University of America in 1999. He was also selected in 1987 for the “Outstanding Young Men of America” award. Jack has been preaching the gospel since 1984. He is presently the full-time coordinator for the Andhra Pradesh, India Mission Work, overseen by the Willette church of Christ in Macon County, TN. Jack leads mission teams into India to conduct evangelistic campaigns and to conduct lectureships for the native preachers. He conducts 12 to 15 gospel meetings each year. Jack speaks at Polishing the Pulpit every year. He has also participated in two debates with a Baptist preacher.

From Capitol Hill to the pulpit, the role of women in this country is changing. The Barna’s Group Research on, “The Trends and Changes of Womanhood and Motherhood” reveals some challenges for the modern home. The amount of women in the labor force has grown from 27 percent in 1948 to 47 percent in 2015. The majority of Americans (77 percent) are comfortable with the future possibility of more women in the workplace.

Recently, during the presidential State of the Union address, President Donald Trump mentioned the fact that more women are in political offices than ever before.

This certainly got a round of applause from most of the women present.

What does the woman working outside the home have to do with the husband being the head of the wife? Though the world celebrates the fact that more and more women are working outside the home, this situation is not pleasing to God. This is not the way He intended for the home to function. The question has often been asked, "Is it sinful for the woman to work outside the home?" Working outside the home, in and of itself, cannot be dubbed as sinful. However, if a woman who works outside the home cannot fulfill her duties of keeping the home, and loving her husband and her children properly, it could become a sin (Tit. 2:3-5).

I am going to make the following statement and it will not be popular: "Women in the workforce are a significant contributing factor to many wives not being obedient to their husbands." I am not saying all women who work outside the home are disobedient to their husbands, but it is a fact that women who are working side by side with worldly people are more likely to be influenced in a negative way.

Women are certainly intelligent and very capable of having careers. They can add much needed helps to society. But, their first and foremost priority is the home and family. Wives who are also mothers certainly have a monumental job in rearing children to know God. She is better able to do this when she has much quality time with them as they are growing up, being raised by her, rather than a daycare center. Thus, husbands should be encouraging their wives to be keepers of the home,

particularly while children are small. Of course, this is something that needs to be understood before marriage takes place. Husbands and wives need to be educated in the roles God has laid out for them in His Word.

When we look at the Bible view, rather than the world's view, we will see that God's design for the home is for the well-being of, both, husband and wife. Let us examine the following text carefully, and we will find our Lord's great love for mankind. We will see that God's laws are to protect and sustain the home, rather than the lies that Satan is blinding women into believing.

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and

the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband (Eph. 5:21-33).

Sadly, misapplication of these verses has caused some husbands to think they are rulers, masters, and kings over their wives. This type of attitude causes wives to be filled with resentment and anger, and this is certainly not what our God intended.

Let us focus on two words that dominate this biblical teaching: **submission** and **love** (Eph. 5:22-29). The Greek word translated “husband” in Ephesians 5:22 is “*aner*”. *Aner* is one of the words translated “man” in the New Testament. Paul was telling the wife to submit herself to her own man. The wife is commanded by the Holy Spirit to submit to her man **as unto the Lord**. This perspective lifts this command to a higher and holier plane.

Authority, and submission to that authority, was put into place by our all-knowing and wise God. A nation without a leader would be destroyed from within in just a matter of time. An army without commanders would create excruciating chaos, and a home without a head is an invitation to failure.

The home must have the right head, a head that is pleasing to God. It was God’s desire to assign to the husband the **task** of being the head of the wife and family. Yes, this headship is a very important job and a tremendous responsibility. This headship implies more than rulership. Notice the comparison of Christ being the head of the church and the Savior of the body. The

husband has the authority, but never is it to be used in a disrespectful or domineering manner. The comparison with Christ as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) reveals in what sense the husband is the wife's head. He, being the head, is interested in her welfare. He is her provider and protector. His pattern is Christ. When a husband adequately submits to the headship of Christ he will conduct himself in such a way that the wife will feel loved and protected and want to be under his leadership.

1 Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." Paul tells us the reason why in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." Adam was created by God, but the woman was taken from the man (Gen. 2:23). Again, we see this example of headship and a submission to authority as set forth by God. Next, we want to examine what this headship entails.

A HUSBAND'S LOVE FOR HIS WIFE

The kind of love a husband is to have for his wife as found in Ephesians 5:25 is agape love. Agape love is, "a selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love" (Wikipedia/ThoughtCo). This is the same type of love the Lord Jesus Christ had for the church. Regardless of the cultural or world view, God demands that husbands love their wives in this manner.

In the tribal areas of India it is the cultural view that

LOVE, HONOR AND OBEY: THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN IS THE MAN

the wife is often treated more like a slave, but she is to still love, honor, and obey her husband as mandated by Almighty God. Thankfully, as Christianity is spreading throughout that country, men are learning to treat their wives more respectfully. Many of these women have endured unfair treatment, but have proven 1 Peter 3:1-2 to be true:

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

In one particular instance a Christian lady had been praying for her husband for 10 years. Her husband had even committed murder and many of the villagers were afraid of him. When he came for baptism this lady sobbed with tears of joy.

Was this man sincere? I had my doubts, but when I returned to India the next year he was carrying armloads of Bibles, handing them out in the villages. This man converted 13 people before he passed away.

Colossians 3:19 says, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." This word, "bitter", denotes harsh or abusive treatment. This is another example of how God's stipulations are for the good of the home.

HEADSHIP AND SUBMISSION DIVINE

Wives need to be reminded that the headship of the husband is a divine calling directly from God. This divine calling is for her protection and provision. She

also needs to understand that her submission to her husband is also a divine mandate. Let us glean some important information concerning this matter from 1 Peter 2. In this chapter Peter speaks of submitting to every ordinance of man, that being the government (vs. 13-17). He also says servants are to be subject to their masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (vs. 18). Next, he speaks of Jesus and how much He suffered for us, and how when He was reviled, He did not revile back (vs. 23). When Peter begins chapter 3, notice the wording: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection.” This word denotes “in the same manner”. Thus, just as we are to be subject to the government, just as servants were to be subject to masters, (this could apply to the employer/employee relationship as well), and as Jesus was subject to mistreatment and even death, wives are to be in subjection. This, no doubt, is very difficult in some marital situations, and God does not expect a wife to remain in a situation where she or the children may be harmed. But, this is a very sobering text concerning the vital importance of submission. Submission will not always be easy, particularly when one is married to a non-believer. This brings to view the urgency that we have in teaching our children to marry faithful Christians.

THE HUSBAND IS TO FULFILL HIS ROLE AS THE HEAD

Some may assume that all husbands gladly take leadership of their home. Sadly, this is a misconception. There are husbands that are very hesitant to take on this

responsibility. In these instances the husband will “sit back” and let the wife have full reign. Thus, he is just as guilty as a wife who lacks submission.

A man who “hands over” his role to his wife is one who does not have a proper respect for the Word. He may just be lazy or too busy with selfish ambitions. He may be more concerned about hanging out with his buddies, spending unnecessary, excessive time on his job, or be wrapped up in a hobby. Some husbands even allow their wives to be the financial provider while he stays home with the children. I understand that there may be situations where the husband is physically unable to hold down a job, and the wife, out of absolute necessity, has to be the financial provider, but one needs to be careful about **intentionally** reversing roles. This is dangerous because it goes completely against God’s plan.

But if anyone does not provide for his own,
and especially for those of his household he has
denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever
(1 Tim. 5:8).

One of the most prevalent problems today, even among Christians, is the fact that many, unwittingly, have gotten addicted to prescription drugs. Because of having gone through a surgery, or being involved in an accident, or suffering from some disease where medication was needed to relieve extreme pain, many have succumbed to a drug habit. This renders them (both men and women) useless in their designated roles. But since we are discussing the man in particular, it leaves the home without a leader.

TRUE SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

If a Christian man is fulfilling his role in being the spiritual leader of the home he is pleasing to God and carrying out one of the most important aspects of his role. A man who maintains spiritual strength will have more self-control and will be less likely to be caught up in his job, hobbies or drugs.

He will honor his wife as 1 Peter 3:7 instructs. He will respect her and treat her as something of great value. He will provide a safe home, physically and emotionally. Home will not be a place filled with criticism, fear, misery or discouragement. In return she will show respect and be his support and proper helpmeet.

A godly husband will do his best to keep immorality out of the home. He will monitor television programs, video games, computers, cell phones, music, books, etc. He will be aware of the company his children are keeping.

Too often husbands are oblivious to what their children are involved in. Several years ago I was a juvenile probation officer. I was required to do drug testing, determine if these children were doing their schoolwork, know what kind of music they were listening to, etc. Often as I would visit in their homes parents would tell me they had not been in their child's bedroom in months, or even years. No wonder these children were on probation! Their parents were not training them (Pro. 22:6). They were shirking their responsibilities.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE CHURCH?

Often a lack of submission in the home leads to a lack of submission in the church. In fact, this is a

problem that has taken the church spiraling downward in the last several years.

With so many women launching out in a new direction in the church, by taking upon themselves leadership roles that are usurping authority over the man, the church is becoming unrecognizable. In many places it is nothing more than another denomination. We may wonder, in light of the scriptures, how and why women would be so brazen as to go beyond what is written and jeopardize the condition of their souls. The fact is that some do not know the scriptures, and others do know the scriptures, but feel as if they have been given a talent they must express in this authoritative position. They know that God wants us to use our talents (Mat. 25), thus their using of these talents overrides the other scriptures that teach that a woman is not to usurp authority over the man.

Let us look closely at the scriptures that reveal the conduct the woman is to display in worship. “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:11-12). The word “teach” here is translated from the Greek verb “*didaskoo*”, which means “to deliver didactic discourses” (Thayer Online). Women are forbidden to deliver “didactic discourses.” Therefore, they are not permitted to preach. This passage forbids the exercise of authority in matters of a religious nature by women. It is interesting to note that the Holy Spirit, in selecting the word for “silence” in 1 Timothy 2:12, did not use the same word found in 1 Corinthians 14:34. This passage reads in part, “Let your women keep silence

in the churches.” The “silence” in this text designates total and complete absence of all sound. The women in 1 Corinthians 14 were required to keep silent because they had no revelation; hence were unable to contribute to the purpose of the meeting, which was to edify the church. The prophets were the means of this revelation. These women were not prophets, thus they had no “word of exhortation” for the people. Because they had no message to convey, they were instructed to remain silent, just as the man who could speak in an unknown tongue was to remain silent if he had no interpreter (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

The “silence” in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is rendered as “quietness” (Greek Lexicon online). Thus, we see the two meanings are somewhat different. As we tie together these texts found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy we see two important factors concerning worship: 1) God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33) and 2) All things are to be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). The reason why women are to learn in quietness and are not to usurp authority over the man is given in this same chapter of 1 Timothy immediately following verses 11-12. It begins, “For”. This can be rendered “because.” “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:13-14). The woman was guilty of **leading** Adam into sin. The very next verse, verse 15 of 1 Timothy 2 shows the proper place for the woman: “Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with

sobriety.” This infers her most important place in the home, rearing her children in a godly manner.

What About Being “One” In Christ?

Galatians 3:28 is sometimes used to justify that there are now no restrictions placed on women in the public assemblies of the saints. It says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Does this verse teach that there are no longer any regulations concerning women in a mixed assembly of men and women? If so, there would be a lack of harmonizing the scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15; Psa. 119:160). This would also make the apostle Paul a liar in the texts we have previously studied. In Galatians 3 Paul is comparing the difference between the old and new laws. He is explaining that things are now different under this new law, the law of Christ. He makes the statement, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). He also points out the fact that the blessing of Abraham would come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:13-14). This is important because previously only the Jews had been God’s special people. He explains how the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The fact that he states that we are all one in Christ simply infers that there is no favoritism with God (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11). No matter what race, or sex, economic or educational level, Christ is the Great Equalizer.

Let us also consider what Paul says in verse 8 of 1 Timothy, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere,

lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” Again, the Greek word for man is used here, “*aner*.” This in no way denotes “mankind”, which would include both males and females. This direction is that men should pray and conduct the exercises of public worship. In 1 Timothy 2:9 Paul begins his discussion of the woman by saying, “In like manner also.” The same apostolic authority that was directed to men is the same used to give direction for the women. As women adorn themselves in modest apparel, have an attitude of humility, and learn in “quietness” with all subjection, they are women who are professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:9-11).

Those who advocate change in the role of women in the church make arguments from a human standpoint, and totally disregard the aforementioned scriptures. They do not want to admit the stipulations laid out for the good of the family and society.

I read the following on a Facebook page:

It’s been pointed out by others and it’s easily verified by research. The church of Christ denomination is dying, and legalistic churches of Christ are leading the way. I think the biggest reason for it is their exclusive mindset, particularly with regard to women. Churches of Christ who are appointing women as deacons, preachers, and elders might survive.

Notice that last statement. It is amazing that these people cannot go to 1 Timothy 3:1 which reads, “If a **man** desire the office of a bishop (elder).” An elder must rule his own house well (1 Tim. 3:5). An elder must not

be a novice, lest he be puffed up with pride (1 Tim. 3:6). An elder must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:7). Also, we see in this text that deacons are to be the husbands of one wife (1 Tim. 3:12).

These scriptures are fully sufficient in proving that the offices of elders and deacons are to be held by men, but it must be stated that Titus 1:5-9 reiterates the qualifications of elders and the truth that they are to be the husbands of one wife.

The above view that “the churches of Christ are dying” sounds disturbing, but there are several mistakes in this assessment of the Lord’s church. First of all, the Lord’s church will survive and thrive because the Lord said she would. In Daniel 2:44 we read that God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. Jesus said He would build His church (kingdom) and He gave Peter the keys to that kingdom (Mat. 16:18-19). In Acts chapter 2 Peter opened the doors to that kingdom (church) when He preached the first gospel sermon and about three thousand people were baptized for the remission of their sins and added to that church (kingdom). The Hebrew’s writer also refers to a kingdom which cannot be moved (Heb. 12:28). Thus, it is a fact that the church of our Lord Jesus Christ will never die. Be assured, God keeps His promises!

Gender Equality and Inclusion in the Churches of Christ

This site has been set up particularly for churches of Christ who meet a certain criteria. See the following:

The churches listed below have all become more inclusive to participation by women in the worship, leadership, ministries, and teaching. Each congregation has decided through much study how inclusive they would like to be. Some congregations are inclusive only in the worship and teaching ministries while others have removed all barriers to women being able to use the gifts they have received from God. Some of the churches listed are churches with a strong Church of Christ tradition, who associate with Churches of Christ, but do not have Church of Christ in their name.

The guidelines developed for listing these churches are as follows: If the answer to one or more questions is YES, then I will happily include their congregation in my directory.

- a) Are women welcome to use their gifts in leading public worship (leading prayer, giving communion talks, leading singing, and/or reading scripture)?
- b) Are women welcome to use their gifts in proclamation by preaching from the pulpit?
- c) Are women welcome to use their gifts and knowledge in biblical instruction, to teach all age groups regardless of gender in bible classes?
- d) Are women welcome to serve in leadership positions such as pulpit minister, worship leader, deacon, and elder (not including positions such as children's minister or women's minister)?
- e) Does the church publish a clear statement

of purpose to be an egalitarian church or gender inclusive church on their website?

We prefer not to list churches where the only position for a woman is the children's or women's minister; though this often represents a small step forward, many churches that presently have these staff positions do not allow women to serve or participate in any other part of worship, teaching, or leadership, and thus cannot be characterized as gender inclusive, equal, or just."

If you look at this website you will find that 80 plus congregations are listed. They meet the criteria, that being that women can, basically, do anything and everything in the leadership of the church. This is a prime example of calling white, black and black, white! This is also a reminder of what a lady once said, who had come out of denominationalism. She made the statement: "I am a black and white person. If I see it written in the Bible I know it is God's truth. I know I must obey it."

Brethren, it is a truly grievous matter that so many blatantly disregard the "black or white" teachings found in the Word.

Without question, there needs to be more teaching done on this subject. Many in the church are no different than those in the denominational world. They are practicing these things without God's approval – God's authority. They are determined to do things their way instead of God's way. They are like the brethren in Rome of which Paul spoke. They have a zeal for God,

but not according to knowledge. They are ignorant of God's righteousness and they are establishing their own righteousness. And, there is that word again, "submit." They have not submitted to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2-3).

Brethren, may God help each of us to have the courage to stand firmly upon a "thus saith the Lord" concerning these vital matters. Let us remember that God's ways are for our utmost benefit, no matter what mankind may propose.

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LOVE, HONOR AND OBEY: THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN IS THE MAN

Case Studies In Political Correctness

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.



Robert R. Taylor, Jr., was born in Bradford, Tennessee, in 1931. He 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 began preaching in 1949. He was educated at Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb and George Peabody for Teachers. Has done local work in TN and MS for fifty-six years. Has been at Ripley, Tennessee, for forty-one years. He has preached in about 500 gospel meetings and over 700 lectureships throughout the nation. Robert has presented over 6,500 sermons on radio and TV. For 28 years he has helped with a prison ministry and baptized inmates. He serves as an instructor for the Online Academy of Biblical Studies for 15 years. He has two children and four grandchildren. He has authored thirty-five books and twenty-five tracts. For seventeen and one-half years he wrote material for Gospel Advocate Quarterlies and the Annual companion. Between 1969 and 1977 he served as a staff writer under B. C. Goodpasture, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. On January 1, 2011, he retired from local work but continues to be an active member at Ripley. He is now spending time in gospel meetings, lectureships, and an immense amount of time in writing.

What a supreme joy it has been to have spoken on all the POWER Lectureships with one exception due to a serious sickness. Genuine thanks are extended to Don, Robert, the elders and all the precious members of the Southaven church. I wish most sincerely that all congregations in our brotherhood had your spiritual stance. But it is not that way. Far too many have departed

from the old paths and a “thus saith the Lord” in their speaking. They have veered widely from the truth and have gone the popular ways of Political Correctness. No longer are they wedded the truth, the whole truth and nothing but saving truth. They are most unlike the beautiful Bereans of Acts 17:11 who were daily students of God’s Holy Word.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IS ANCIENT IN AGE

This exact term, Political Correctness, has emerged in recent times. I have dictionaries dating back to the mid-twentieth century. They do not contain this exact designation. I also have a dictionary that has just been put out. It uses the term and defines the now popular term. Modern man has given the exact name. Defined, the doctrine and practice refer to a liberal teaching of pleasing the possessor of such and all the ones he seeks to please. It is a deep plunge into dangerous waters.

Many people are surprised how dominant and accepted these have been with modern man and woman. The masses have accepted this philosophy that is wrong in order to be more popular with the masses. However, this is no justification for its practice.

The Patriarchal Age overflows with such practices. Even in Eden the concept had its origin with Eve, her sin and what Adam did in following her lead. Man and woman were created on the sixth day of creation week as per Genesis 1: 26-27. Both were made or created in the image and likeness of Jehovah God. What a noble origin belonged to beginning humanity. There

is nothing noble in evolution's attempt to picture how man and woman came to be. Every aspect of it overflows with total foolishness. Why anyone ever adopted this folly is amazing to me and no doubt to you also. Adam and Eve were created wonderfully well, being fashioned after their own Maker or Creator.

They were created holy and innocent. They were not created with sin tainting their souls and neither are we! They were given a perfect paradise. They were given much leeway as touching what they could eat. Only one tree and its fruit were forbidden them. This was the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They were given a weighty warning relative toward it – eat thereof and die. Genesis 3 is the saddest chapter in all the Bible. Daring defiance toward Deity whetted Eve's aroused appetite. This was a positive, divine law and deeply understandable to the human mind. This was right because God commanded it testing man's allegiance to his Maker. The malicious tempter was conning, sly and deceptive. He presented nothing good to Eve but only evil. She was clueless at what was coming to her with devilish intent. The serpent told her she would not die; Jehovah had told them in Genesis 2 that they would die. This truly had surety attached to it. He convinced her that upon partaking of this fruit, it would make her wise as God. She was human and not divine. Eve would not take on divinity by this act when completed. He lied to her. She heard a lie, believed a lie and obeyed a lie. She stretched forth her hand, ate of the forbidden fruit and led Adam to follow her in this sinful situation. Surely Adam knew what he was doing but did it nevertheless.

Surely, he knew it would be a damnable sin but follow her he did. He preferred his wife above his God and Maker. Political correctness was at the helm. It appears to me that this is the exact origin of Political Correctness.

Promptly, they were expelled from Edenic excellencies. Political Correctness did not work for the pair's well-being.

We come down some ten generations to the era of Noah. Masses of men and women sought for the ardent approval of that evil society. Their peer's were evil and so were every one of them. Only one man, Noah, and his family were righteous before God. They loved God and His way with deep delight. Sin was not a pleasure for them. They were not going to be caught in its greedy clutches. They were commanded to build that massive ark for their physical salvation from the world-wide flood. These eight believed and started this consuming work that took decades to complete. They did not accept the popular position of eating and drinking today for tomorrow we die. Save for Noah and his family of seven, all others faced watery destruction universally. Political Correctness did not work for that deeply evil generation. It will not work any better for modern men and women, boys and girls. It is not cracked up to be by its avid supporters. It is a sure to fall philosophy.

Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Joseph are very prominent from Genesis 11-50. They were faithful servants to God and never sought to follow the dangerous way of Political Correctness with a few exceptions as Sarah and Hagar, Jacob and Laban. Their lot was to live among pagans who cared for nothing

regarding the living Jehovah. Political Correctness was not helpful in the least to these Old Testament worthies. In the long run it did not aid its avid patrons. Their pagan neighbors lived for the day; these faithful saints lived for God and His cause on earth. Hebrews 11:14-16 provides one of the keys to their success as traveling sojourners headed for the great above in the next world. It was of great credit to the three founding fathers of the Israelites that Jehovah chose to be known as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Sacred Scripture does not allow its readers to forget this beautiful designation. Inspiration prompted the Biblical penman to use it very frequently. I have always read it with delight. I, for one, am happy that it is found in both Testaments. This heroic trio lived and died as faithful servants to Almighty God. Jesus said of these that they would be in the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 8:11). Their neighbors had their gods and goddesses. They died in idolatry. For a surety they will not be on the great Judge’s right hand come judgement day. Matthew 25:31-46 so affirm. Political Correctness patrons of such face Hadean torment and the eternal horrors of Gehenna. These are blockades to that awful destiny. Political Correctness will not ease Hadean torments and will not put out the flaming fires of Gehenna.

Rebekah And Jacob

What these two did to blind Isaac seems so heartless. What they did may have seemed politically correct to them but it surely was not to Esau or to blind Isaac. It caused a deep rift between the two brothers and surely must have done damage to Isaac and Rebekah.

Pharaoh And Israel

In the early chapters of Exodus we see firsthand the cruel treatment that Pharaoh meted out to his slaves – the Israelites. It was cruel beyond what can be described accurately. It was to his benefit to keep these people in bonds. He did all he could to thwart Moses and Aaron. The plagues failed to move him toward Israel's release. It took the tenth and final one to wake him up to the demands God made of him. God's hardening of his heart has been troubling to Bible students. God hardened his heart; he hardened his own heart. It was hardened because God made demands of him he was unwilling to meet. That is how he hardens hearts today. He makes demands of alien sinners they wish to avoid. Even after the official release he changed his mind and sought to return them to Egypt. Political Correctness was costly to Pharaoh and all Egypt. His own people suffered greatly due to his selfishness.

Aaron, Israel And The Golden Calf

Moses and Aaron had brought the slave nation out of its tyranny. Leaving Egypt, they were in the wilderness. They have come to Mount Sinai. Moses has gone to the summit of Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. He was there 40 days. Aaron was left in charge. The people pressured Aaron to make for them an idol – the Golden Calf. God had not changed His mind about His instructions given in Exodus 20. The first two forbade every form of idolatry. They vowed that what He told them in Exodus 20 that they would keep His laws (Exo. 20:19). Yet here they are casting God and His law aside

for a man-made idol. They worshipped the idol and even committed immorality freely. Paul alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 10 and the consequences brought them. Moses and the Lord were all filled with wrath. Proper punishment was meted out immediately. Political Correctness did not work for Israel at Sinai.

Moses And Exodus 23:2

Moses said to Israel, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shall thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgement.” This applied to them individually as well as a nation. Yet they would do that very thing throughout 40 years of wilderness wandering. What a deep burden Moses carried on his Herculean shoulders. Political Correctness did not work well for these disobeying people. Paul has something to say about this in Hebrews 3.

Moses And Aaron The Smitten Rock

From time to time God supplied needed water for the thirsty nation. Moses and Aaron were the human agents that led Israel from the bondage of Egypt. In Numbers 20 the people needed water. God had supplied it earlier; He would do so again. Moses and Aaron were commanded to speak to the rock. Instead the two brothers struck the rock. Speaking and smiting are not the same. Also, they took credit for supplying the water. They left God out of the picture. Due to this the offended Jehovah decreed that neither of the brothers would set foot within coveted Canaan. Aaron died at Mount Hor and Moses atop Mount Nebo. He saw the

land from afar but died short of reaching it. They paid dearly for their disobedience. Political Correctness did not work for these two.

The Ten Spies And Their Report

Moses chose one man from each tribe. They were sent to search the land and bring back a report. They agreed the land was very good but because of this fortification we are unable to conquer these powerful people. We read about this in Numbers 13-14. Two valiant men, Caleb and Joshua, said we could. The majority sided with the ten, not with the two. As a result of their unbelief, they were doomed to wander in that vast wilderness for forty long years. They at that time were only a short distance from Southern Canaan. Political Correctness did not work for this disobeying majority. Neither will it for us. With ease we can recall the noble names of Caleb and Joshua. How many of us can give names of the ten without looking at Numbers 13? At times I have memorized the names of these ten but on the spur of the moment cannot do it now.

Saul And Jehovah's Word

Saul was Israel's first king. He was much better as a man and a king earlier than in the latter part of his kingship. Jehovah sent him on a mission to destroy all Ameleks. Orders for this were well submitted to the king. God's order did not set well with the stubborn monarch. He saved alive Agag and the king and the best of the cattle. He sought to place blame on the people for this sin. In following his own desire and his army

he was following Political Correctness all the way. He deemed his will was above God's. The remainder of his life was down, Down, DOWN! The end of his life was tragic indeed.

Rehoboam And Israel

As far as the record goes, Solomon had only one son. Solomon was wise; his son was a fool. At the beginning of his reign he was asked of the people to ease the tremendous burden Solomon had placed upon them. He sought help from the older men; they said listen to the people and do their bidding. This he did not like. Then he went to younger men for their counsel. They said make their burdens even harder. This he liked and he followed it. Ten of the tribes pulled away forming the Northern Kingdom. It would be called Israel. For the next few centuries, there would be Judah and Israel. Political Correctness was no friend to Rehoboam. This truth runs throughout the Bible.

Jeroboam And Israel

He led the forces that confronted Rehoboam and became the first king of the Northern Kingdom. He followed what he and his subjects desired. He had the majority of the people on his side. He established Jeroboam's religion. He changed matters promptly. The object and time of worship are changed. The place is changed. So are the ones who led the worship. Political Correctness was no friend to the wayward king. Kings who followed him were said to have walked in the steps of Jeroboam, the son of Nadab, who made Israel to sin.

Political Correctness was no friend to Jeroboam and Israel.

OTHER OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Political Correctness offered no hope for the prophet of Judah who delivered a message to the Northern Kingdom. He was told not to eat when there. But he listened to the lying prophet in Samaria and did what God told him not to do. He was killed by a lion on his way home. We can read about this in 1 Kings 13. The false prophet was the voice of Political Correctness.

Political Correctness surely was no help to Zedekiah, the final king of Judah. The stubborn king should have listened to Jeremiah. We can read about this in 2 Kings 24-25.

NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Jewish leaders, Pharisees and Sadducees, though it was wise on their part to oppose the rising prophet from Nazareth of Galilee than to take up discipleship in Christ's cause. At his trials and Calvary His disciples thinned out in large numbers. It was no longer the Galilean prophet they opposed; now it was the crucified Christ. Political Correctness paved the way later for their national destruction by Rome in A. D. 70.

In John 6, John's longest chapter, many of His disciples no longer walked with Him. He had said too many hard things according to them. He was no longer worthy of their loyalty. It became the popular thing with them to forsake Christ.

Political Correctness did not aid Simon Peter at the

trials of his Master. He was standing with a crowd who hated Jesus of Nazareth. Before such people he denied thrice that he knew Jesus Christ. With a piercing look from his disappointed Master he repented and wept bitterly. We are so glad he did.

In Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1-2 and 26:9-11, Saul of Tarsus hated everything about Christ and His disciples. What a marvelous change he made in Acts 9, 22, 26. No one ever served the Lord with more loyalty than did Paul. Yet inspiration prompted him to write 1 Corinthians 15:10.

In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul predicted that in later years some would depart from the faith. History bears this out.

Political Correctness aided in this development. It surely did not keep people walking in the old paths. There was a massive apostasy.

In Revelation 3:14-22, lukewarm Laodicea has cast out the Christ and He stood at the door waiting for it to be opened. An artist once painted a portrait of the ousted Christ standing at the door. Upon finishing it he called in some of his artist friends to critique it; most praised it highly. One said he detected a flaw in the painting. He said you have Christ before a door which has no doorknob. How is he going to come inside? The producing artist said it was no oversight. The door opens from the inside – not the outside. Obedience to Christ and His Word is the only way to allow Him inside. Political Correctness would have kept that door closed for ever for this congregation that was doing what they thought was right but how wrong they were.

CONCLUSION

The popular way of Political Correctness is the wide gate and the broad way of Matthew 7:13-14. The straight gate with the narrow way is not for people who live by Political Correctness guidelines who prefer man-made ways and not God-made norms.

Classes For Women

Sarah: A Model Of Submission

Mary Lawson



Mary is married to Cletis who serves as the deacon over education at the Southaven Church of Christ. Together, they have three children; Tyler (8), Noah (6), and Kimber (4). Mary is originally from Brent, AL. She has a BS degree in dietetics from the University of Montevallo. Mary worked as a registered dietitian before staying at home with her children. Currently, she is homeschooling her children. She has done mission work in Guyana, South America. At Southaven, she is involved in teaching children's Bible classes, as well as teaching Ladies Bible class and devotionals.

It is a beautiful late summer afternoon in Charleston, South Carolina on Saturday, September 8, 2007. The church is decorated with a beautiful arrangement of purple flowers. The tulle bows have been perfectly tied onto the pews and the candles have been lit. The reception hall is ready to receive its guests with an appetizing display of food and beverages. The cake is beautiful, although slightly leaning from the coastal heat and humidity. The many weeks of preparations will soon come to an end as the bride's father will walk her down the aisle to give her away to a man who will soon be her husband. Somewhere amidst all the pomp and circumstance these words are spoken: "I, Mary Louise Parker, take you, Cletis Mathew Lawson, to be my lawful wedded husband, promising that I will be

to you a faithful, loving and devoted wife; that I will love, honor and obey you, that I will remain with you in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, and forsaking all others, keep myself to you and you alone so long as I live.”

Almost twelve years ago I made a promise to my husband that I would remain faithful to him no matter what the circumstances of our life would be. I also made a promise to him and I vowed before God and before many witnesses that I would love, honor and obey him. Sadly, today many woman are choosing to drop the word obey from their wedding vows. Why is it the case that so many women are choosing to do away with the very biblical wording of the traditional wedding vows? Here’s what some women had to say:

“I obey the law, not my husband.”

“We didn’t promise to obey. That’s not a promise I was making by marrying him.”

“I do not believe I need to ‘obey’ him, because we are equals.”

“Obey sounds so strict ... what about good ol’ fashioned respect.” (To Love, Honor, and Obey?)

It’s no wonder half of all marriages end in divorce and a substantial percentage of those who are married are unhappy in that marriage! As a society in America, we have stepped away from God’s design on marriage and the home. We have become a society that is saturated with political correctness. We fail to do things God’s way because it may offend others or it may seem that we are being intolerant and unloving of others. As Christians, we must step away from the cultural stigma

that's associated with doing marriage God's way. If we want happy marriages that last, we must make it our resolve to be politically incorrect regarding God's design and role for marriage.

GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

God's design for marriage can be traced back to the very beginning. In Genesis 2, we read how God created a helper comparable to man using man's flesh, bone, and blood. God created woman for the man (1 Cor. 11:7-8). When two people are married it involves a leaving (of the previous family unit) and a cleaving (to your spouse). The two who are married are one flesh, which indicates that they are supposed to be inseparable. God has always and will always intend for marriage to be "until death do ye part" (Rom. 7:2-3, 1 Cor. 7:39). Jesus tells us in Matthew 19:6 what God has joined together in marriage, man should not even try to separate.

From the very beginning, God not only had a great design for marriage, He also created roles for each spouse within that marriage. In Genesis 3, the serpent deceived Eve who ate of the forbidden fruit. She then gave some to her husband who was with her. The Bible is very clear that Eve was the one who was deceived by the serpent (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Notice the consequence for the woman after this sin. In Genesis 3:16, we see that there would be greater sorrow and pain associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Look carefully at this part—"Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of*

the Bible, the Hebrew word for desire is *tesh-oo-kaw*, which means stretching out after; a longing:-desire. This means that the wife should have a longing for or a stretching out after for her husband. The Hebrew word for rule is *maw-shal*, which means to have dominion, govern, reign, to have power (Strong). This means that the husband is to have dominion over the wife. He is to govern, reign, and have power over her. This does not sound very politically correct, does it?

WHAT IS SUBMISSION?

The Greek word for submission is *hupotasso*, which is a military term meaning to rank under. According to *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, *hupo* means under and *tasso* means to arrange, so *hupotasso* is to arrange under. Throughout the New Testament, we see that the wife is to be arranged under the husband. 1 Corinthians 11:3 states that "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." The God-ordained hierarchy is to be: God, Christ, man, woman. To be head indicates one who controls the power or one in authority. The one who God has placed in authority over the woman is man.

Paul compares marriage to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5:22-33. From this comparison we see that the wife is to submit to her husband as to the Lord. This is to be something she does voluntarily, not because of a sense of duty. Just as Christ is head of the church, so the husband is head of the wife. In this passage we see the great responsibility that a husband has to his wife. He is

to love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. The husband is to love his wife as he loves his own body. If a husband loves his wife this much, it will not be very difficult for her to be in subjection to him and respect him. In writing to the Colossians regarding a Christian home, Paul once again commands the wife to submit to her own husband (3:18). She is to do this “as is fitting in the Lord”, meaning as long as what he is asking her to submit to is within the Lord’s will.

Several characteristics of a godly woman are discussed in Titus 2. Included in this discussion is that a woman is to love her husband and be obedient to him. Peter stated that a wife is to be submissive to her own husband even if he does not obey the word (1 Pet. 3:1). That means a Christian wife is still obligated to submit to her husband even if he is a non-Christian.

Over and over the Holy Scriptures teach plainly and clearly the command for a wife to submit to her husband. We expect that women in the world would not understand this. Sadly, many within the church find the idea of a wife submitting to her husband to be very objectionable. Fortunately, the Bible has given an example of submission to follow today: Sarah.

SARAH AND SUBMISSION

Peter tells us that in former times there were holy women who trusted in God and adorned themselves with a spirit of submissiveness to their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:5). He specifically gives the example of Sarah, “... as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid

with any terror” (1 Pet. 3:6). Sarah understood that her husband, Abraham, was the head of their house. She knew he was the one who holds the authority in their relationship. Sarah even addressed her husband as lord, meaning ruler. Sarah made it her habit to obey her husband. As we will see shortly, she didn’t always get this right, but it was her way of life to be obedient to and in subjection to Abraham. If we submit and obey our husbands, we are worthy to be called the daughters of Sarah.

In Genesis 12, we begin to see the very submissive wife that Sarah was to Abraham. Abraham and Sarah were moving to a land that God would show them. Hebrews 11:8 informs us that they went out not knowing where they were going. Most likely Sarah had lived in the land of Ur her entire life. All of her friends and relatives were likely there. History tells us that Ur of the Chaldeans was very advanced for its time. Some of the homes even had running water (Elkins 956). Sarah had a pretty good life in Ur. However, Abraham made a decision and told Sarah they were moving. If she complained or had any reservations regarding this, the Bible gives us no record of it. Whether Sarah wanted to leave her family, friends, and homeland is irrelevant. Abraham made a decision for their family that they would go. Sarah obediently submitted to that.

Furthermore, appreciate with me that the Bible also remains silent as to Sarah’s reaction to the constant traveling. Sarah is 65 years old at the time they began their travels. If being just slightly past the age of mid-life (Sarah died at age 127; Gen. 23:1) didn’t pose any

difficulties, think about the difficulties of travel in biblical times. Abraham and Sarah had many animals and servants. It would have been very slow traveling. Corinne Elkins states, “From the day they set their faces ‘westward’ Sarah’s life was never the same. She became a nomad, living in a tent the rest of her life; for some time, her bed was in a different place every night” (Elkins 956). As Sarah sojourned with her husband she showed her submission by not complaining, nagging, or questioning even when inconveniences and difficulties were present.

In Genesis 14, Abraham is going off to war to free his nephew Lot who had been taken captive. When Abraham was getting ready to leave, we do not read of Sarah questioning his decision or begging him not to go. She didn’t start whining or crying, although I’m sure she knew the dangers he may face on such an expedition. Abraham left knowing he could count on his obedient wife to keep things running smoothly at home while he was away.

We can easily see Sarah’s submissive role in chapters 17 and 18 of Genesis. God told Abraham to change Sarai’s name to Sarah (Gen. 17:15). What if your husband decided to change your name? How would that make you feel? Unfortunately today, there are many women who won’t even take their husband’s last name when they are married. I have even known of a couple where the husband took the wife’s last name! We also read that Sarah would bear a child, but the child would be Abraham’s (Gen. 17:17, 19, 21). Abraham, not Sarah, would name their baby Isaac (Gen. 17:19, 21). What if

you didn't have a say-so in the naming of your child? In all of this, Sarah reverentially submitted to Abraham.

In Genesis 18, Abraham invites three unexpected visitors to eat with them. When they accepted, "Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes'" (Gen 18:6). Appreciate with me that Sarah didn't have cakes in the freezer that she could just toss in the microwave to thaw. This was a time-consuming task, and she was expected to drop everything she was currently doing to do what he asked. We know she did because we read about it in 1 Peter 3:6, "as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord". She lovingly obeyed him when it may have seemed inconvenient to her or like it was something that could just wait until she was ready.

WHEN NOT TO SUBMIT

Shortly after Abraham and Sarah started their journey, a famine hit the land. On their way to Egypt to escape the famine, Abraham asks Sarah to tell the Egyptians that she is his sister for fear that he would be killed on account of her. Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's house and Abraham was treated well. But soon after, the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues. The text indicates the Egyptians received the plagues because of Sarah (Gen. 12:17). After this, Pharaoh sends Abraham, his wife, and all that they had out of the land of Egypt.

One would think Abraham and Sarah had learned their lesson. However, later in Genesis 20, the same thing happens in Gerar with King Abimelech. The text

indicates that both Abraham and Sarah told Abimelech that they were siblings (Gen. 20:5). When questioned by Abimelech as to why they did this, Abraham said that he feared for his own safety and life. He also said that Sarah really was his sister; she was the daughter of his father, but not his mother. Genesis 20:13 gives a very interesting detail as to why this “half-truth” was being told. Abraham says, “. . .when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her [Sarah], ‘This is your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, ‘He is my brother.’””

As Abraham and Sarah journeyed from place to place, they made it a regular practice to tell this half-truth. It is true that she was his half-sister, but the fact of the matter is that she was his wife! They were telling this half-truth with the intent to deceive. Sure, Sarah was an obedient wife and she made good on that promise to Abraham. But was it right for Sarah to follow her husband, even in doing wrong? No! God hates all liars (Pro. 6:16-17) and it is a sin to lie (Rev. 21:8). Paul warns us in 1 Timothy 5:22 to not be a part in other people’s sins and to remain pure. Sarah went along with this deceitful scheme on two occasions that we know of and it was not right for her to do this.

Today, God gives us one exception for when a wife should not obey her husband, and that is if he is asking her to do something that goes against the law of God. “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) As a Christian, Christ must come first (Mat. 6:33). If my husband is asking me to do something contrary to the will of Christ, I must obey Christ.

There is a situation in 1 Corinthians 7:15-16 where the unbelieving spouse departs. We are told that the Christian spouse is no longer under bondage in this situation. This is not giving us another acceptable reason for divorce (Mat. 19). What it is saying is that if an unbelieving husband is giving his wife an ultimatum to abandon her faith, she must choose her faith. If her husband leaves her for this, she is not under bondage to obey him. She can't forsake Christ. We can see in this situation why it is so important to marry a faithful Christian who is going to help you go to heaven.

SUBMISSION IS WRONG

In Genesis 16, Sarah is getting older and remains barren, so she suggests to Abraham to lie with her handmaid, Hagar. Surprisingly, Abraham did as Sarah suggested. Genesis 16:4 indicates that Sarah became despised in Hagar's eyes. Perhaps Hagar became very prideful when she saw that she could conceive, yet her mistress could not. After all, this sexual encounter with the master elevated Hagar's position from handmaid to concubine. Afterwards, Sarah is very upset with Abraham and puts all the blame on him (Gen. 16:5). Wasn't all of this her idea in the first place? Sarah dealt so harshly with Hagar that Hagar ran away. Eventually, Hagar returns and bore Abraham a baby boy named Ishmael.

Eventually Isaac is born. As Isaac grew and was weaned, a great feast was prepared for him. Ishmael comes along mocking and scoffing at Isaac. Look at how Sarah talks to Abraham about this. "Therefore

she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac’” (Gen. 21:10). Now look at Abraham’s response. “And the matter was **very displeasing** in Abraham’s sight because of his son” (Gen. 21:11). Because of the original lack of leadership on Abraham’s part and the roles of submission being reversed the stage was set “for a major fiasco from which the world has never recovered. We do not understand why Abraham did not refuse or at least consult God in this matter. The enmity between the Arabs and the Jews only heightens each day” (Elkins 961).

We can see the many difficulties that arose as a result of Sarah taking the lead role over her husband. Jealousy and trust issues ensued. There was anger, pride, and hatred. I’m sure this became a big grievance in Abraham and Sarah’s marriage. Yet many today believe that submission within the marriage is mutual between each spouse, that a husband and wife have equal roles and they are to have equal respect and submission for each other. That may sound good, but it is not biblical.

Within the home there must be a clearly defined leader. We can see this in other areas. What if a first lieutenant in the army decided he and the major general have mutual submission? That lieutenant is not going to last very long. What if the kindergarten student and teacher agreed upon mutual submission in the classroom? The result would be total chaos. The results in marriage are very much the same when we decide on mutual submission within the marriage relationship. The relationship may not last very long and chaos will

be the result. God has already decided who He wants the leader in the home to be. The head of every woman is man (1 Cor. 11:3). Wives are to submit to their own husband as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22).

What if the husband won't take the lead? Regardless of what the husband will or will not do, he is still commanded to be the head of the home, even if he doesn't want to. It is not up to him to decide to give his God-given role to his wife. However, as the wife, I may need to do some self-examination to determine if I am part of the reason why he will not lead. Will he not lead because I have the stronger personality? Will he not lead because I "won't let" him? Will he not lead because I think I am better at leading? Chances are if he is not leading as he ought to be, the wife is not submitting as she ought to be.

WHAT SUBMISSION SHOULD LOOK LIKE TODAY

"While we may associate worldliness with immoral action (i.e., drinking, fornication, adultery, gambling, etc.), the big temptation to be like the world, for God's women today, may be in Satan's lure for us to lead our husbands, to assert our authority in society, and to be loud and self-promoting in our very personalities" (Colley 530).

As the church is subject to Christ, wives are to be subject to their own husband in everything (Eph. 5:24). This is referring to more than just spiritual matters. Remember the wives in 1 Peter 3 were married to men who were not Christians. These wives could not

obey their husbands in everything spiritual since their husbands were not following anything spiritual. To be subject to my husband in everything means exactly what it says: I am to obey my husband in **everything**. This means if he wants me to bake chocolate chip butterscotch cookies, I bake chocolate chip butterscotch cookies. If he wants me to go with him to visit someone in the hospital, I go. If he wants me to mail that package today, I start making my way to the post office. The husband is the leader in all things. However, it is the case that the godly husband will delegate some of his authority to his wife in certain areas.

This command is quite easy to follow when the “in everything” is what I want or something that is indifferent to me. The real test of submission is my response when it’s not really something I like or want to do. When teaching my children about obedience I teach them the four keys to obedience:

1. We obey immediately. That means we obey the first time we are asked.
2. We obey without complaining. That means no fussing, pouting or crying.
3. We obey cheerfully. That means we do it with a smile.
4. We obey completely. That means we do what we are asked the right way the whole way through.

We would do well to apply these elementary principles to our marriage. It may seem unnatural in our society today for a woman to give up what she wants in order to serve her husband. It may seem unrealistic that she will not always get her way in the marital

relationship. It may seem unnecessary that only one is appointed as the head of the household. To clear up any confusion about what submission is, let's discuss some things that submission is not.

Submission does not mean the wife will always agree with her husband on everything. There may be certain matters of judgment in which the two spouses will disagree, and that's okay. As the wife, it is okay to state my opinion in a kind, respectful manner to my husband. However, when all is said and done, he ultimately makes the final decision, and he is accountable to God for that decision. It is the job of the wife to support and honor that decision.

To be submissive to my husband does not mean that I can never influence my husband. We should always strive to be a good example and help those around us to live a godly life in obedience to the commands of the word of God, especially those within our own household. If I am a Christian and my husband is a Christian, it is a very biblical concept to lovingly let him know if he has sin in his life or if he is doing something harmful to his influence as a Christian (Gal. 6:1). Oftentimes a wife can influence her husband by the way she lives her life without even saying a word (1 Pet. 3:1). My relationship with my husband is the greatest relationship I can ever have on this earth. I should do all that I can to help him go to Heaven.

Submission to my husband does not mean that I obey out of fear. If my husband is abusive, it is not godly submission when I obey because I am afraid of the emotional, verbal, or physical abuse. I would strongly

suggest seeking counsel if you are in this situation. Submission to my husband is something I do voluntarily because I understand that God wants me to and because I want to.

Finally, submission does not mean that I am inferior. God created all people regardless of gender, race, social, or educational status to be one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). A wife's submission to her husband doesn't mean that she is of any lesser value than her husband. God created man and woman to be equal. However, He did create man and woman to have different roles.

As women we possess a certain power over those men that we love so much. We should never abuse our powers to manipulate our husband to get what we want instead of submitting to his way. We should never withhold sex or use sex as a tactic to get our way. We should avoid the urge to start whining and crying when we don't want to obey our husband. Nagging, pouting, and the silent treatment are all very ineffective approaches to godly submission. Submission to your husband should be overflowing with politeness. The golden rule should always be the standard for how you treat your husband. If I am unhappy about something in my marriage I need to pray about it, and then lovingly talk it out with my husband. Never let the sun go down on your wrath (Eph. 4:26). Life is too short to harbor bitterness, resentment, and hatred in my heart, especially to the man whom I have committed my heart. Instead of abusing the powers we possess, we should opt to use our power of self-control. When we fail to do this we are doing more damage than we could ever

imagine. Sometimes the damage is hard to reverse. We can help ourselves to happiness within our marriage when we choose to do marriage God's way.

CONCLUSION

Choosing to do marriage God's way has many great benefits. The first and most obvious is that our marriage will be happier and stronger. Our husbands will be better for it. He will be happier and better able to face the challenges he encounters daily knowing he has the love and respect of his wife. Family life will be less complicated. Our homes will be a haven of safety from the world around us. We are training our children to have happier, more prosperous marriages in their future. When we follow the God-given roles within our marriages, God's word is being honored in our very lives (Tit. 2:5). If we continue to make it our way of life to submit to our husband, we are modeling Sarah, and we can be her daughter if we follow in her example.

If we choose to follow the commands of godly submission we are not going to be like the vast majority of women in the world around us. "While women around us make fun of their husbands, we will honor ours. While they attempt to usurp the roles of leadership and family provision, we will be happy to follow and flourish in the roles for which God created woman" (Colley 530). Many in our feminist society may scoff and bash us because we choose to do marriage God's way. We may be made fun of and be the subject of many laughs and jokes because we choose to stand up against the political correctness of the day. We may

find ourselves standing up for right, yet we stand alone, sometimes even within the body of Christ. God never promised that the life of a Christian would be without difficulties (2 Tim. 3:12). However, He did promise that when we are faced with persecutions because of the political incorrectness we choose to follow by lovingly and obediently submitting to our husbands we can “rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Mat.* 5:12).

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Cozbi: Sexual Freedom

Melissa Cain



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Purity had been a national emphasis. It had become a national crisis. Thousands pursued sexual freedom while the righteous grieved over the sickness and shame caused by the sin. People were dying. God was angry.

Is this a description of modern America or of ancient Israel?

Both.

The year was 1408 BC. God had described Israel as a pure nation: “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel” (Num. 23:21, KJV). Imperfect? Yes. Nevertheless, they had followed God all the way to the plains of Moab and the border of the promised land. It was here that the pure nation corrupted themselves with the daughters of Moab in the promiscuous worship of Baal (Num. 25:1). In a particularly brazen display, as the nation wept over the ensuing punishment and plague, a Simeonite prince named Zimri flaunted his Midianitish paramour past the grieving group and into

his tent (Num. 25:6). Enraged at their audacity, the high priest's son Phinehas pursued them into the tent and, with a single thrust of his spear, ended their promiscuity and the plague (Num. 25:7-8).

This entire event was a calculated ploy by Israel's enemies to corrupt God's people and bring God's curses upon them (Num. 25:12; Num. 31:16), and it had worked. Ungodly Moabite leaders took a money-loving prophet's advice and steered their women to seduce Israel, but the speared Midianitish woman serves as the public face of the devil's organized effort to corrupt God's chosen nation through sexual freedom. Her name was Cozbi (Num. 25:15).

The year was 2018. On November 26 a call was issued to women near and far, directed to women who felt they had been shamed as middle schoolers, teens, and twenty-somethings (Bois, "Feminist..."). The summons to this broad group appealed to the belief that they are victims of an effort that encouraged them to stay chaste until marriage. The height of this movement took place during the 1990's and went into the early 2000's. Evangelical groups are credited with the movement endorsing abstinence until marriage, but even the federal government supported the purity emphasis: "Under the Bush administration, organizations that [promoted] abstinence and [encouraged] teens to sign virginity pledges or wear purity rings have received federal grants" (*History of the Purity Ring*).

What was this shame-causing crusade? It was called the Purity Movement. Purity rings were being sold and given away as a token of the wearers' promise between

themselves and God, between themselves and their parents, and/or between themselves and peers.

Fast-forward to 2018: a former “Lutheran pastor” named Nadia Boltz-Weber decides that it is time to have a movement of her own. Referring to herself as the “tatted-up, foul-mouthed leader of a new, muscular form of liberal Christianity,” she announced publicly on her Twitter account that she had a “massive art project” (Bois, “Feminist...”). Her project aimed to create a golden idol to female genitalia in protest of evangelical purity, and she asked women to send their shame-bearing purity rings to use as material: “Beginning November 12th, until December 17th [2018], you’ll have the opportunity to send in your purity rings to be melted down and recast into a golden vagina” (Bois, “Feminist...”). In return, those who were willing to send in their symbolic baggage of virtue would be the proud recipients of a certificate declaring their freedom from what she called the “evangelical purity culture,” a culture she is committed to “take down.”

This thing about women that the church has tried to hide and control and that is a canvas on which other people can write their own righteousness – it’s actually ours,” Boltz-Weber said. “**This part of me is mine** and I get to determine what is good for it and if it’s beautiful and how I use it in the world.” (Bois, “Feminist...,” emp. added)

From Boltz-Weber’s own words and actions, she refused to answer to anyone about how she uses **her body**, especially the most private aspects of **her body**. “I get to determine what is good for it and if it’s beautiful and how I use it in the world” (emp. added). To remind these women

further of how powerful they have become since leaving the oppression of purity, those who submitted their purity rings were given a certificate of impurity and a “SHAMELESS, impurity ring (sic)” (Bois, “Feminist...”), an apparent derogatory reference to purity-promoting promise rings or chastity rings. She had difficulty finding a man to fill her unique request; five declined her project, but eventually a female welder was willing and able to create the golden idol.

Purity, once a national emphasis, has become increasingly shamed, and shameless women are the public face of the movement.

Women have the ability to be as persuasive today as they were when they pulled God’s people away to worship Baal. Promiscuity can be just as corruptive as it was when it compelled Zimri to bring Cozbi through the crowd of crying people at the temple. Sexual freedom is still as destructive to a country, culture, and its children today as it was 3400 years ago.

THE FAIRER SEX IS PERSUASIVE

Alluring women accomplished what military men could not: they persuaded a nation to turn their backs on God. An old adage says, “The man may be the head of the household, but the woman is the neck, and she can turn the head whichever way she pleases.” This type of joke seems laughable on the surface, but if this nation is not careful, the women’s head-turning influence will deter America from greatness to complete corruption.

A woman’s negative influence on the man has been present from the beginning, when Eve overstepped her

God-given role and Adam under-stepped his (Gen. 3:1-7): missteps are bound to occur when the wrong spouse wears the wrong shoes. The woman's head-turning ways did not end in the garden. Later the sons of God, Enos' lineage, looked upon the daughters of men, Cain's lineage, and liked what they saw: "That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. 6:2). The women looked good to the men and they began to have children together. Those children grew to become influential like their fathers, "men of renown," and wicked like their mothers, the daughters of Cain (Gen. 6:4). Evil, influential men and women had been procreated: a damningly devastating combination: "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" (Gen 6:5). The female powers of persuasion struck again when barren Sarai convinced Abram to have a child with Hagar rather than waiting on God (Gen. 16:2-6). Abram's nephew Lot had two virgin daughters who were master manipulators: after their escape from the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and their mother's death, Lot's daughters convinced him to drink and took liberty to conceive his children while he was in a wine-induced stupor (Gen. 19:30-36). These girls were undoubtedly the product of the sinful culture wherein they lived their entire lives (Keil & Delitzsch). Even after escaping almost-certain death, the debauchery of their childhood environment was an engrained and ongoing influence; it was a part of who they were. They had managed to remain pure physically (virgins), but they were

impure spiritually. They saw nothing amiss in lying with their father. Their lack of remorse shows in the naming of their children, as if to brag about their incestuous actions: Moab [literally, from the father] and Ben-Ammi [literally, son of my father] (Keil & Delitzsch). No one ever had to ask these boys, “Who’s your daddy?” Their manipulating mothers had proudly labeled them as products of their persuasive incest.

Throughout time women have known the art of persuasion. It starts early. It starts young. It often involves sex.

What does the Bible call a woman who uses sex to persuade? How does scripture define the woman who uses her body as a bargaining chip? The behavior of the daughters of Moab was called “whoredom” (Num. 25:1). Solomon used the word “harlot” to describe the woman who used her body to get what she wanted (Pro. 7:10-23).

How many Christian women use their bodies as the primary tool in persuading their husbands, withholding intimacy to sway his mind or usurp his authority? “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4), but not when the marriage bed becomes a negotiating table or a payment counter. A wife soils the beauty of marital intimacy when she makes her husband act like a child asking for a cookie, and she cheapens its value when she withholds affection like an ultimatum (1 Cor. 7:3-5)? Harlots use sex to get what they want, not wives. How many wives have turned themselves into harlots with only one customer?

Let Christians teach girls that their bodies are for God’s glory, not for bartering (1 Cor. 6:20). Let Christian girls learn that sexual freedom is beautiful when enjoyed

within the liberties of marriage as God intended (Heb. 13:5). Let Christian wives have too much respect for themselves, their husbands, and their marriage to succumb to the temptation to manipulate their husbands by using their bodies to persuade.

ILLICIT SEX IS CORRUPTIVE

Lustful leaders chasing wild women led Israel into corruption. Cozbi was a Midianite princess whose Addakian name, Kuzābatum, means voluptuous or well-endowed (“Cozbi”). She made a lasting impression on a young man from the tribe of Simeon named Zimri (Num. 25:14-15). Zimri must have been absolutely enamored by this picturesque princess. He flaunted her past his brethren as the nation wept at the door of the tabernacle: grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles mourning the fact that God had issued a death warrant for many of His people: their family members. A sickness had broken out among God’s people resulting from the wickedness of Israel’s joining themselves to Baal-Peor. Their sins were not only spreading like wildfire, they were spreading like a plague and so a plague was sent to cure it. God fought fire with fire, combatting their plague of sin with a plague of sickness. It could be said that this was a sexually communicable disease of epic proportions: worse than gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis, AIDS, and Ebola combined. God had told Moses to halt the spread of evil by killing those who were leading and joining in the wickedness. The people were overwhelmed by God’s prescribed cure for the iniquity: “Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord, out in the

sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel” (Num. 25:4, NKJV). Instead of obeying God and hanging the ringleaders, the people took time to grieve. Instead of stopping the spread of the sin, they stopped to cry. Scripture does not specify when this plague began, but it is clear what had to happen for it to stop. Had the judges done as they were told and killed the guilty, the plague might never have begun. Were the judges weeping at the door also?

As God’s people grieved, along came Zimri with his new prize, Cozbi. “And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” (Num. 25:6). Zimri shamelessly paraded the princess before his brethren. It was like a man bringing a woman of ill report to his mother’s funeral, scantily clad in a prom dress, and then putting her on display at the front of the auditorium **in the church building**. As can be imagined, their performance must have been despicable. The crying worshippers paused from their sadness, looked up from their tear-soaked hands, and saw what was causing the whispers all around them. Perhaps some whispered, “Don’t look; she’s not wearing clothes,” another quipped, “They can’t keep their hands off of one another,” and someone else asks, “How has it come to this? How have we let sin into the camp? What are we going to do now?” All the congregation of Israel wept at the door, a congregation of brethren standing around talk, talk, talking about all the terrible, terrible events and no one, nobody, not a single soul stepped up

to take action against the sin. Imagine it! The judges, the leaders of the people, were doing nothing. If they had done what they were told to do, this plague might have been avoided. The very people that God entrusted to take care of the situation were not acting.

Out of all of these people, one man was zealous enough for God to get a handle on what was happening. Zimri and Cozbi made it all the way through the crowd, probably not taking their eyes off one another long enough to see the despondency and rage on the faces of the spectators, and entered the tent. They wasted no time getting to the task that onlookers knew they were initiating outside the tent. “Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel” (Num. 25:7-8).

Phinehas’ spear “pierced both of them through in the very act” (Keil & Delitzsch, *emph. added*). The fact that both died from the same spear thrust shows what they were doing. How had Israel allowed the act of sex to lead to such corruption?

The Israelites had traveled in the wilderness for almost 40 years. God’s people neared the end and they were about to receive their promise. They had seen the great works of Jehovah. He had guided them through their journeys with a cloud by day and fire by night. Israel had recently conquered the Canaanites at Hormah, were healed of being struck by the serpents, were revived and

supplied with water at Beer, and defeated King Sihon. As they continued on their passage, King Og came out against them with all of his people, and the Lord reassured Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon” (Num. 21:34). Not only did they overcome the people of Bashan; they left no survivors. With God’s help Og’s people had been exterminated. Afterward another king named Balak heard of God’s people entering the land of Moab. He knew not to engage the people in battle, having learned of the dreadful fate that would come upon his people if he attempted to thwart the Lord’s people. His people, the Moabites, were, “sick with dread because of the children of Israel” (Num. 22:3). Word had spread. Moab was already in an alliance with the Midianites, and they had come together to discuss their impending doom: “So Moab said to the elders of Midian, ‘Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.’ And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time” (Num. 22: 3-4). Knowing of the terror that Israel had brought on surrounding kingdoms, they were convinced that they were next on Israel’s “to-conquer” list. Balak, king of the Moabites, appeared to have been smarter than the kings that had previously opposed the Jews’ route. He sent messengers to a soothsayer named Balaam, describing the arrival and vastness of Israel and asking Balaam to curse God’s people so they could be defeated, and telling Balaam, “I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed” (Num. 22:6).

When Balaam received Balak's message of distress, he told the messengers to stay overnight and he would tell them what the Lord said to him. This is the first of six times that Balaam declared that he would only speak what the Lord said to him. God came to Balaam and inquired about the men who were staying with him. He told God of Balak's request to curse Israel, and God replied, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (Num. 22:12). Balaam kept his word that he would not speak anything beyond what the Lord told him, saying to the messengers, "Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you" (Num. 22:13). Balaam initially appeared to be a stand-up fellow, and he continued with this façade until Balak began speaking Balaam's preferred language and promised great honor. Balaam was clearly a man of greed, as confirmed in the New Testament: "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 11). Balak offered "great honor," but Balaam's desire was revealed by his reply, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more" (Num. 22:18). Peter described the avarice of "Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15). Balaam again asked the princes to stay the night and await God's message. God again instructed Balaam, "If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the work which I speak to you – that you shall do" (Num. 22:20, emp. added). Scripture never depicted the men coming to Balaam in

the morning, but his opportunism could not bypass the possibility of great honor. “So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab” (Num. 22:21). A direct command from God had been disobeyed, and the angel of the Lord would have slain Balaam as he travelled had the soothsayer’s donkey not had more spiritual sight than Balaam (Num. 22:32). Balaam was ultimately allowed to go to Balak, being told by the angel, “Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak” (Num. 22:35).

Balak received Balaam in a desperate manner, questioning his slow response to the king’s request to come and curse God’s blessed people. The soothsayer soothed the king but reminded him for the third time, “The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak” (Num. 22:38). Balak and Balaam began the process of offering sacrifices and requesting prophecies from God, and each time God denied Balak’s hopes for Israel to be cursed; rather they were bountifully blessed. Balak was displeased with the results, but for the fourth time Balaam tells him, “Must I not take heed to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth” (Num. 23:12). Balak and Balaam went to another location to offer a second sacrifice, hoping to invoke a curse upon Israel, and when Balak once again did not like the outcome, Balaam answered, “Did I not tell you, saying, ‘All that the Lord speaks, that I must do?’” (Num. 23:25), stressing his desire to hold to the Word of the Lord for the fifth time. The two men went to a third place and build another set of altars, attempting again to bring a curse upon the people. By this time Balaam could see that God was only going to bless the people, so

he did not even bother using his enchantments. Instead he began to speak a prophecy from God about how this nation would be exalted by Him. The prophecy concluded, “Blessed is he who blesses you, And cursed is he who curses you” (Num. 24:9). It is easy to imagine that after all of the traveling, the carrying of supplies, and the hiking up and down mountains, that Balak’s temper was kindled. He has offered forty-two animals in an attempt to curse these people, and they have only been blessed, and blessed, and blessed again (Num. 24:10-11). Balaam defended his words again: “I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that I must speak” (Num. 24:13). For the sixth and final time, Balaam refused to exceed God’s Word. After prophesying of what Israel would do to Balak’s people in time to come, Balaam and Balak went their separate ways: “So Balaam rose and departed and returned to his place; Balak also went his way” (Num. 24:25).

At the close of this announcement Balaam and Balak departed from one another. “Balaam rose up, and went and turned towards his place” (i.e., set out on the way to his house); “and king Balak also went his way.” does not mean, “he returned to his place,” into his home beyond the Euphrates but merely “he turned towards his place” (both here and in Gen. 18:33). That he really returned home, is not implied in the words themselves; and the question, whether he did so, must be determined from other circumstances. In the further course of the history, we learn that Balaam went to the Midianites, and advised them to seduce the Israelites to unfaithfulness to Jehovah, by tempting them to join in the worship of Peor (Num. 31:16). (Keil & Delitzsch)

At least six times Balaam declared that he could only speak the words that God gave him. “I will bring back word to you as the Lord speaks to me,” “I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more,” “The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak,” “Must I not take heed to speak what the Lord has put in my mouth,” “All that the Lord speaks, that I must do,” “What the Lord says, that I must speak” (Num. 22:8; Num. 22:18; Num. 22:38; Num. 23:12; Num. 23:25; Num. 24:13). As Balaam left, Balak’s materialistic taunt must have cut him to the core: “I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the Lord has kept you back from honor” (Num. 24:11). After parting ways, Balaam returned with advice that led directly to Israel being enticed into sexual immorality, for Moses said that the women of Moab “caused the children of Israel, **through the counsel of Balaam**, to commit trespass against the Lord” (Num. 31:16; emp. added). Jesus later said that Balaam “taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality” (Rev. 2:14). Balaam, a man who refused to say anything other than what God had said, gave counsel that culminated in alluring Israel into sin. If Balaam was so committed to saying only what God had said, what could that counsel have been?

During his second prophecy, he told Balak what God had not observed in His chosen nation, “He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him” (Num. 23:21).

Balaam did not have to go beyond what the Lord had said. All he had to do was emphasize to Balak the

fact that God was good to Israel because He had not seen iniquity in the people or wickedness in Israel. Balak did not recommend the strategy of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” His tactic was “if you can’t beat ‘em, get ‘em to join you!” In this way, they did:

Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove and the 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, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel (Num. 25:1-3).

The elders of Moab and Midian had been conjecturing how to overcome the Israelites since they saw them move into the neighborhood. When paying the diviner did not work, when offering the twenty-one bulls and twenty-one goats failed, and when God refused to curse His people, Balak brought out the big guns: the women would achieve what all the male leaders could not accomplish, and inflict the sort of damage that no man of war could bring upon Israel. It was the sex appeal of the Moabite women that “caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord” (Num. 31:15-16, KJV). This plague killed 24,000 people, with all but 1,000 of them dying in one day (Num. 25:9; 1 Cor. 10:8).

Balaam’s attempts to bring curses upon Israel were met with futility so long as God did not “observe iniquity in Jacob” nor “wickedness in Israel” (Num. 23:21). The enemies of God’s people quickly realized the surest way

to defeat God's people is first to defile them. That was the case with ancient Israel. That is the case in the Lord's church.

SEXUAL FREEDOM IS DESTRUCTIVE

The nation of Israel was nearly destroyed because of a pack of wild women and the herd of voluntary victims that pursued them. The guilty ones were willingly wicked, having known the goodness of God; seeing it, touching it, and tasting it.

This desire for wicked gratification remained in Paul's day, much like it does today.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools. (Rom. 1:20-23, NKJV)

Bible students can learn much from the Old Testament: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4, KJV). Recalling the events concerning "the matter of Cozbi" (Num. 25:18), Paul wrote: "Now these things were our examples... Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand" (1 Cor. 10:6-8). First century saints needed the warning concerning such acts, and so do twenty-first century believers.

When a country and culture turn away from God and toward sexual freedom, children will inevitably follow suit and become products of corrupted influence. Lot's wife is often remembered, but Lot's daughters ought to be remembered as well. When Christians reside beside and inside a nation that practices unrestrained immorality, the infection invariably threatens God's chosen people. Cozbi's country and culture crafted her into the successful seductresses she and her fellow temptresses became, leading to the demise of 24,000 souls in Israel. How many souls perish today because of the push for sexual freedom? The leading cause of death globally among girls age fifteen to nineteen is complications during pregnancy and childbirth ("Detailed STD Facts..."). "A total of 1,708,569 cases of Chlamydia trachomatis infection were reported to the CDC," and "almost two-thirds of all reported chlamydia cases were among persons aged 15-24," making women from that age group seven times more likely to be diagnosed than the rest of the population ("Detailed STD Facts..."). The chlamydia infection rate of almost four percent among women between ages fifteen and twenty-four is frighteningly similar to the mortality rate among the Israelites in the matter of Peor: 24,000 of 600,000, or four percent.

Parents must be ever so cautious not to allow the world's notion of "good" to pull their children away. What influences sculpted Cozbi into the woman she became? She was indisputably a product of her promiscuous culture. Suppose Cozbi had been born in the year 2000: what factors would have shaped her character? There were the television shows she watched, with networks gradually

introducing alternative lifestyles and planting seeds of doubt about right and wrong. There were late nights alone with a television or a TV app where she was exposed to pornography at age 8 and became heavily addicted: no, pornography addiction is not only a boy/man problem. What are children seeing on their personal devices? What are they watching in their private bedrooms? Only four percent of Israel's population chased their sexual desires, but the numbers are far worse today, in large part because these lusts are introduced and chased from earlier and earlier ages, shaping who children become.

A Google Trends analysis indicates that searches for "Teen Porn" have more than tripled between 2005-2013. Total searches for teen-related porn reached an estimated 500,000 daily — one-third of total daily searches for pornographic web sites. ("Teens and Young Adults...")

Data from the PEW Internet and American Life Project suggest that 70% of 15-17 year old Internet users accidentally view pornography "very" or "Somewhat" often. ("Teens and Young Adults...")

Of sexually explicit content produced by children aged 15 years or younger: 89.5% of content was created using a web cam; 93.1% of content featured young girls; 89.9% of the total images and videos were distributed on third party websites. ("Youth-Produced Sexual Content")

The modern Cozbi was guided to become the woman she was by her involvement in certain extra-curricular activities. The jazz dance classes taught her to dress in skimpy clothing, suggestively move her body to music, and put on a show for crowds of people: talents that

made her a standout as both cheerleader and prom date. She learned early to feast on others' attention while their eyes feasted on her form. The Cozbi of today heard about morality from friends at school and occasionally from a friend's youth minister. She signed and committed herself to the supposedly shame-bearing purity pledge when she first learned of it, but when she proudly told her father about her commitment, he ridiculed her and ruled that was impossible to stay pure until marriage; the man was later exposed to be a sex addict himself. She threw purity out the window at age fifteen; coming out to her best friends and telling them she thought she was a lesbian. She had decided that sex with boys was a bad thing, but that God would not judge her for being with girls. Her view of what was unrighteous changed throughout her young life, and it all started with a lack of moral foundation.

Today's Cozbi has done many detestable things. Will anyone care enough for her to teach her the Gospel? Can she overcome the temptations of her ungodly nation and culture and begin following the Lord? If the fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, and sodomites in Corinth could be washed, sanctified, and justified, surely today's Cozbi can, right (1 Cor. 6:9-11)?

The Cozbi of today has been exposed to and at times involved in some of the very deeds Paul described, deeds that continue rampantly throughout this nation and the world. A mother and son in New Mexico are facing jail time for incest. The mother is thirty-six and the son nineteen. They claimed they fell in love after being reunited since she had given him up for adoption as a baby. The mother explained their relationship, "We

ended up kissing and kissing led to other things” (Daily Mail, UK). They claim they deliberately publicized their relationship “to raise awareness about ‘Genetic Sexual Attraction’” (“Trial for New Mexico...”). “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves” (Rom. 1:24, NKJV).

Recall the former religious leader with her golden idol of femininity who declared that part of her body was hers and she would do with it as she pleased, rejecting her Maker and exalting herself: “Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever” (Rom 1:25). During the 2018 Macy’s Day Parade, families across the country were twenty minutes into the popular program when a scene from the musical “The Prom” was performed with two women kissing on live television. The family-oriented tradition of viewing the parade was stolen from many that day. “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature” (Rom. 1:26). When people forsake God’s design and morality, anything goes. A recent documentary exposed the disturbing practice of Columbian men whose first intimate relationship is with a donkey and who view it as a right of passage: a preview shows natives defending the custom, “Because it’s culture and culture should be respected” (Donkey Love). This film appears to make light of the vile act of bestiality. “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving

in themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (Rom 1:27). A “Christian” high school student in Ohio was suspended in March of 2019 for posting Bible verses on lockers and walls in response to LGBT pride flags and posters decorating the halls of her school. Should she not have known that the rules forbade her to post about her beliefs but they could freely post theirs? “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting” (Rom. 1:28). A Michigan man is suing his parents for \$86,000 because they destroyed his personal pornography collection that he valued at \$29,000. His father responded to one of his son’s accusatory emails, “We counted twelve moving boxes full of pornography plus two boxes of ‘sex toys’... We began that day the process of destroying them and it took quite a while to do so. Believe it or not, one reason for why I destroyed your porn was for your own mental and emotional health... Someday, I hope you will understand” (Bois, “Man Sues...”). “Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents” (Rom. 1:29-30).

What about political platforms that claim there is absolutely nothing wrong with those behaviors condemned by Paul? Party supporters may not all practice those deeds, but when the ballot includes a candidate that opposes sexual deviancy, to vote for a candidate that approves of this behavior is to vote in **approval** of the behavior itself. “Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving,

unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also **approve** of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:31-32, emp. added). Are children being taught that approval of unrighteousness and sin warrants the same wage as sin (Rom. 6:23)? That was Paul’s position, that such complicity will cost people their souls (Rom. 1:32). Serving sin leads to bondage (Rom. 6:16). Sexual freedom is no freedom at all; it is bondage to sin. Its impact destroys the individual, the home, and eventually the nation. The only remedy is the true freedom that comes in serving righteousness (Rom. 6:18), regardless of what today’s Cozbi might say.

CONCLUSION

Lustful Israelites were chasing sexual freedom when they joined to Baal of Peor (Num. 25:1), and God’s people faced God’s anger because of their pursuit of sexual immorality and their apathy toward it. Those events are still relevant examples for Christians (1 Cor. 10:8). The fairer sex can be as persuasive today as they were when they allured God’s people to worship idol gods, illicit sex is just as corruptive as it was when Zimri pranced his princess through the grieving worshippers, and sexual freedom is as destructive to a country, culture, and its children today as it ever was. As influential as women can be, the righteous few cannot afford to sit back and simply disregard the wickedness as it surrounds God’s people and infiltrates their homes. Once it enters the home, that is only the beginning.

Women of God must have a zeal for God like

Phinehas. Christian women must be willing to thrust a spear at whatever comes between them, their husbands, their children, and their Lord. The homes must be taken back to be led in the paths of righteousness. Just as when Israel was too busy lamenting Moab's influence to resist it, to do nothing as the allurements tempt will only allow sin to spread. Balaam's idea for corruption was "if you can't beat 'em, get 'em to join you." The daughters of the King must be true princesses of purity, taking the purifying Gospel to the lost in their communities and sharing with the wanderers what someone shared with them. Women in personal evangelism, Bible class teachers, mothers, grandmothers, and the like are uniquely qualified to preach to this generation of women about the value of virtue as they strive to please God: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, KJV). Remind the women of today and tomorrow that they are priceless and peculiar because they have been purchased. The Biblical Cozbi never submitted to God: a spear pierced her body. Today's Christian woman seeks to reach today's Cozbi by piercing her heart with the Gospel, before she faces the wages of her sin and before it spreads to persuade, corrupt, and destroy those who strive to walk in the light.

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Icabod's Mother: Failure To Discipline

Shelley Hazel



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Eli's life was all about the Lord; he was the high priest after all. From the time he woke up until he went to bed, Eli was serving the Lord everyday. However, the Bible tells us that somehow, in the midst of all his Godly service, Eli failed to restrain his sons (1 Sam. 3:13). As preachers' and leaders' families, we understand how our obligations can come to equal service to the Lord in our minds, and how the line between what I'm doing for my personal spiritual growth and what I'm doing for my job, or out of a sense duty, can become blurred. I believe this may have been the case for Eli, and in pursuing the things of God, he lost sight of the importance of discipline.

Unlike the judges who preceded him, Eli was given the dual responsibilities of the office of high priest and judge over Israel (1 Sam. 4:18). It appears as though he performed his priestly duties well; he gave wise counsel to Hannah and raised Samuel to know the Lord (1 Sam.

1 and 3). Sadly, Eli was not so fastidious in his duties as a father. In 1 Samuel 2, we learn that Eli's sons, Phinehas and Hophni, grossly abused their positions as priests in exchange for wealth and sex. When Eli learned of their horrible sins, he merely rebuked them, but failed to use his powerful position to stop their crimes (1 Sam. 2:12-26). Because he neglected his responsibility to discipline Hophni and Phinehas not only as a father but as high priest and judge as well, God sent a man to prophesy against Eli's family. Not only would they be removed from the line of high priests, but his family would no longer reach old age and both his sons would die on the same day (1 Sam. 2:27-36).

All of this came to pass on one dark day in Israel's history. The day began with a battle against the Philistines in which the Israelites lost 4,000 men. Hearing of the defeat, the Israelite elders decided to send the ark of the covenant with their army to face the Philistines again. With this symbol of the Lord marching with them, everyone, including the Philistine army, was convinced the Israelites would win. However, as God had forewarned Eli, their victory was not to be. Not only did the Philistines slaughter 30,000 foot soldiers, but they captured the ark of the covenant and killed Hophni and Phinehas as well. Eli, 98 years old and heavy, awaited news of the battle in a chair on the city wall. When he heard about Israel's great loss on top of the death of his two sons, he fell off the wall and died.

In all these events leading up to 1 Samuel 4, we have yet to be introduced to the subject of this lesson. Thus far, the focus has been on Eli and his wicked sons

because, in my opinion, the fate of this woman was controlled by the men who surrounded her. In the story of the Bible, Ichabod's mother appears to be not so much a player as a victim of circumstance. I'd like to give her the benefit of the doubt. While she was married to a very wicked man, Phinehas was from a good, Godly family. Presumably, she married him fully expecting that her husband would be a stable leader of God's people much the same way as we might seek a mate for our children whose parents are leaders in the church. What she got was a sex addicted, false worshipping blasphemer who led the people entrusted to him astray.

It is impossible to say how much she knew about Phinehas before she married him and to what degree she had any choice in the matter. What we do know about this unnamed woman, we learn on what must have been the single worst day of her short life. On that day, she lost her brother-in-law, her father-in-law, and her husband. One can assume she married into the high priest's family expecting stability and provision all her life, but that security died with the men in her life. Moreover, she lost the joy that should have accompanied the birth of her son when all happiness was overshadowed by the tragic events of the day. Additionally, she lost the ark of the covenant—the symbol of God's presence with her people. Finally, in naming her son Ichabod or “where is the glory” we see that she had lost all hope. Ichabod's mother was someone who felt abandoned by God and alone in this world.

As we read her sad story, we may be tempted to question the fairness of her situation. Who is to blame here? She did not fail to discipline. As a woman in a patriarchal society, she

had no authority to stop her husband's wickedness. She did not misuse her position or corrupt a God-appointed office, yet she and her innocent baby suffered the consequences alongside the men in their lives. When we find ourselves in terrible situations such as Eli, the Israelites and Ichabod's mother faced that day, it is common for us to look for someone or something to blame. Perhaps there were many factors that led to their downfall, but I propose that a lack of discipline was a key component to the tragic events of the day.

First, Eli's sons did not practice self discipline, and I don't want to let them off the hook. All sin, in essence, begins with one's self. James 1:14-15 states, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Here James could not be any clearer in showing that sin is the fault of the one who acts on his own evil desires. The Bible admonishes us time and again to control ourselves. Peter lists self-control among the Christian graces we should be adding to our faith (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Paul names self-control as part of the fruit of the Spirit that is a natural outcome of a life in pursuit of godliness (Gal. 5:22-23). In Titus 2, Paul says that self control should be taught to and exhibited in Christian men and women of all ages.

Most likely, Phinehas and Hophni lacked self control in their lives because they did not practice the God directed spiritual disciplines. In the Old Testament, in particular the book of Leviticus, God spelled out a regimented lifestyle that the priests were to maintain in order to present themselves as pure individuals able to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. Clearly,

the wicked brothers did not impress the words of God on their hearts and souls (Deu. 11:18) because they completely disregarded His instructions for handling the offerings and keeping themselves pure. Under the new law, Christians are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) called upon to present ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). Consequently, Jesus left us many examples of things we can do in order to grow in godliness. In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul says to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Time spent reading and meditating on God’s word, praying, fasting, serving, learning and discipling all draw us closer to Him. Neglecting to do these things that God has commanded will stunt our spiritual growth and leave us open to sin like Eli’s sons.

Next, it is clear that Eli did not practice discipline in his home. The Bible speaks plainly in 1 Samuel 3:13 that Eli was at fault for his failure to restrain his sons in their wickedness. As an aide in a classroom of 26 three-year-olds, let me tell you that I have witnessed the importance of consistent, effective discipline; K3 would be a living nightmare without some serious rules and follow-through on the consequences. Any classroom teacher can tell you that the number one hindrance to learning is poor classroom management, a.k.a. a lack of discipline. Kids are masterful manipulators, and they will work you from every angle to get what they want. As parents or people with authority over children, we have to thoughtfully lay out clear rules of conduct and expectations for how our children are to behave if we want them to succeed. These rules should not be our own whims or pet peeves. Otherwise we are just despots

of our own little family units. Instead, our rules ought to flow naturally from guiding principles in our lives. For example, as Christians, obedience to God is our number one guiding principle. Thus, it is logical for rules in our households to include things such as “do not take the Lord’s name in vain,” “don’t lie” and “treat others the way we want to be treated.” Attendance to worship should not be optional because it is not optional in a faithful Christian’s life (Heb. 10:25).

However, if the majority of rules in our homes have no overarching principles but are merely a series of edicts given by a parent to control daily activities (“No, you cannot play video games yet because I said so.” “We aren’t getting that toy out today.”--implying maybe you can tomorrow but maybe not; “You’ll take a shower when I say you will.”--”because you’re the queen of bathing!), or if rules arise as temporary measures to stop annoying behaviors (ex: “No more tv today; it is too loud!” “Go to your rooms; I’m tired of dealing with you!”), then we aren’t so much disciplining as we are dictating; and no one likes a dictator ruling over them. Effective discipline that directs our children into a Godly way of life requires time, thought and hard work. It necessitates that parents go back and look at decisions they’ve made to see if they are truly leading their families closer to God, or if they are just managing the chaos like the ringleader of a circus.

Finally, Ichabod’s mother suffered because God’s people did not practice discipline against the wicked priests. Some might argue that Eli fulfilled his responsibilities as a father by talking to his sons about their sin. After all, a parent cannot force their

adult children to obey. He had neither the right nor expectation as a father to physically punish them or remove privileges. However, Eli was not only their father, but he was their spiritual and civil leader as well. He had a right and responsibility as the high priest and judge of Israel to punish sin in their midst. In the old law, we see examples of spiritual leaders going to drastic measures to deal with sin. In Numbers 25, God praises Aaron's grandson, Phineas, for removing His wrath by running a spear through an Israelite man and the Midianite woman he brazenly brought into the camp. Similarly, the new testament admonishes us not to tolerate sin in the church. Scriptures like Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Timothy 1:20, and 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15 give us clear instructions on how to deal with an erring brother, yet few congregations practice church discipline. In the guise of being too humble to dare confront a brother about his sin, churches who do not practice discipline pridefully refuse to submit to the Lord's teaching on the matter (1 Cor. 5:2). Ephesians 5:3 says that "immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among the saints", and verse 11 tells us to expose "unfruitful deeds of darkness." When we allow sin to enter the body, we bring shame and reproach on the bride of Christ. Furthermore, tolerating sin in the body encourages the younger generations to sin because they reason sin must not be as bad as the Bible teaches, and they need not fear any consequences. Biblical humility demands that we first remove the sin in our own lives, so we can help our brothers and sisters deal

with their sin before it is everlastingly too late.

As you can see in the sad story of Ichabod's mother, a lack of discipline in any area of a Christian's life builds and snowballs becoming a crazy cycle that continues to feed on itself. If you are not practicing spiritual disciplines to increase in Godliness in your life, then how can you be disciplined from sin and temptation? If you are an undisciplined Christian with sin in your life, then how can you effectively discipline your children or deal with sin in the church? Conversely, if you fail to discipline your children, they will lack the character to seek the things of God in their lives. Sin will enter the church, but you will have already set a precedent of not dealing with sin in people's lives. When will it end? Get off the cycle! Be the person, or family, or congregation that stops the madness. Stand up and declare that you will not let sin get a hold on your life, your heart, your family, or your church. Discipline is essential to a functioning Christian or body. A lack of discipline in any area reflects poorly on Christ and causes sin to creep in and over take us. This life is a war against Satan and his powers of sin and temptation. We are soldiers for Christ. What army would last without discipline? It is ridiculous to consider going to war with untrained, undisciplined troops. Yet we face even greater powers daily without practicing discipline in our own lives or churches. I invite you today to discipline yourself--study and grow, share this Godly discipline with your family to keep your children from evil, and, when you know a brother or sister is in sin, practice discipline in your congregation and save their souls from hell.

Abigail: Living In A Had Marriage

Brenda Rutherford



Brenda is married to Rod for over fifty years and together they have three children; Debra Davis, Kevin and Brett Rutherford. They have eight grandchildren and one great granddaughter. Both of their sons, and one of their grandsons are gospel preachers. All of their children and grandchildren are married to faithful Christians. She has been a Christian for over sixty years. Brenda has served in the mission fields of Zambia (Africa) and Tasmania (Australia). She has taught teacher training classes, children's classes, and women's classes in several foreign countries as well as in the United States. Brenda has authored a book entitled, "*Brenda's Diary*" about their adventures as a missionary family in Zambia. She has also taught classes in Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, Zambia, Malawi, Marshall Islands, and Saipan. She has worked as the office manager for *Truth for the Word*. Brenda received her BS degree in Elementary Education at David Lipscomb College.

What comes to your mind when we talk about Abigail? Her beauty? Her intelligence? Her despicable husband, Nabal? Or her becoming the wife of King David?

In our study today, we are going to look at the great qualities of Abigail, the great qualities of David and the foolish, ill-tempered and mean qualities of Nabal. Finally, we will examine some lessons we can learn from each of them.

Let us see first what is the background to the story of these three people. Remember, this is the period of

time when David was trying to stay one step ahead of King Saul and his men. In 1 Samuel 23:15, we see that David knew Saul was seeking to take his life. David and his 600 men were constantly on the run, trying to find shelter, food and to survive the vengeance of King Saul. In 1 Samuel 25, we see David and his men in distress and lacking provisions.

Abigail was a woman of beauty, intelligence and kindness, with a sunny personality. Her name means: “father of joy” or “cause of joy or happiness” (Lockyer 23). Her religious knowledge of Jewish history testified to an early training in a godly home. She was acquainted with the teachings of the prophets in Israel. But her marriage cannot have been a happy one. She was married to Nabal who was ill-tempered and very foolish. His very name means “prominence” or “foolish” (Lockyer 249). When David came to Nabal asking for food for his hungry men, this greedy, selfish man refused. David’s men explained to him they did not harm his shepherds nor was anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. These words, doubtless, refer to the protection which David’s armed band had afforded to the herdsmen against the frequent raids of the neighboring people—the Philistines and other more savage and unscrupulous tribes who dwelt on the borders of Palestine (Henry, commentary internet).

David sent ten young men to greet Nabal to explain to him their care of his shepherds and to ask for provisions (1 Sam. 25:5-7). Nabal was a wealthy man, but not a generous man. He was covetous and selfish in every way. Notice his answer to David’s men.

Who is David and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from? (1 Sam. 25:10-11, NKJV).

He had plenty, but would not assist David and his men. God will not be mocked. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Men may not even take God into consideration when they are blessed with riches. However, God knows their hearts and how they use their wealth. God knows those who are giving liberally and those who are greedy and selfish. “...He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). If Nabal had considered how God wished him to use his wealth, he would have given generously. His wealth would have actually increased.

Nabal did not want to share his wealth with David, nor did he want to help David and his men in any way. Nabal’s response deeply insulted David. This attitude of Nabal set in action a very dangerous plan on David’s part. He did not take this rejection well. David swore he would kill every male in Nabal’s house (1 Sam. 25:22). David did not waste any time. He strapped on his sword as did also 400 of his men. Immediately, they were on their way to destroy Nabal and his household.

One of Nabal’s servants saved the day! He told Abigail that Nabal had reviled David (1 Sam. 25:14) and that David was on his way to do harm to all his

household. Notice what this young man said about Nabal; “He is such a scoundrel.” Today, we would say he is a rascal, or disreputable person (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Nabal was such a worthless, passionate, and ill-natured man that he would not permit a man to speak to him about anything. It was no use to try, which was the reason this servant did not speak to him about this problem (Gill commentary-internet). He came to Abigail with hope she would hear him. Immediately, she prepared two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs and loaded them on donkeys (1 Sam 25:18). Abigail was not only intelligent and beautiful, but she was also very brave. David and his 400 armed men were heading straight toward her and she was on her way to meet them. Think about this! David and his 400 men have been dishonored by Nabal and were intent on revenge with their swords ready. This did not stop Abigail. She approached David with great diplomacy, humbly presenting a peace offering. She recognized who David was. She dismounted from her donkey and fell on her face before him and bowed down to the ground (1 Sam. 25:23). Her behavior was very submissive. She did not try to excuse her husband’s response. In an attempt to stop the bloodshed and save innocent lives, she asked for the blame to be on her (1 Sam. 25:28). “Abigail’s action in these words took upon herself the guilt of her husband, hoping in this to save his life, and this in spite of Nabal’s unworthiness. A more noble act of self-sacrificing love would be hard indeed to find”

(Coffman, internet). Abigail used sound reasoning. She told David, Nabal was not important enough to warrant his taking vengeance upon him; and besides, as Abigail pointed out, it was contrary to God's law. Abigail was a godly woman who had a knowledge of the Law.

Also, Abigail was fully aware that her husband was a worthless man who was greedy and had a quick temper. She pointed out how he was a man of foolish actions (1 Sam. 25: 25). In 1 Samuel 25:26, we see Abigail becoming a messenger of the Lord.

Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord, be as Nabal.

Abigail made an interesting statement; "since the Lord held you back from coming to bloodshed...." In God's providential care of David, it seems that Abigail might have played a part in keeping him from killing innocent people. She applauded David for the good services he had done against the common enemies of his country. She hoped he would not stain his reputation by any personal revenge: "My lord fights the battles of the Lord and evil is not found in you throughout your days" (1 Sam. 25:28). Now thanks to Abigail, David can face the future with a clean heart and conscience. David, the future king, should be very grateful to her for her generous and brave act.

Abigail's intercession, fast action, and gentle plea immediately brought a positive response from David.

He first gave thanks to God as he realized His mighty hand in this situation. He praised this wise woman standing before him for taking such quick action to keep him from shedding innocent blood (1 Sam. 25:32-33). He repented of his angry decision to take revenge on Nabal. Abigail not only helped David, but saved all the household of Nabal from being killed. David thanked her for her gifts and gave her assurance that he would not attack her household and said, "Go up in peace to your house."

Then the scene changed and we see what is going on with Nabal. When Abigail arrived home. She wisely decided it was not the time to tell him how she had approached David. Nabal was in the middle of a feast, arrogant, and drinking to excess. He was completely unaware of the danger his decision had put his household in. Abigail realized he would be angry if she interrupted his celebration and his drinking, so decided not to tell him until the morning.

Again we see the bravery of Abigail. The next morning, when Nabal was sober, Abigail confronted him and explained what she had done. We see here another wonderful attribute of Abigail; she is honest and does not hold things back from her husband. She told him all she had done and how she had helped David and his men. Upon hearing this news, when he realized how close he came to David's killing him and his whole household, he suffered either a heart attack or a stroke. He continued to live another ten days. Then the Lord intervened. The Bible says, "The Lord struck Nabal and he died" (1 Sam. 25:38).

David, upon hearing of the death of Nabal, wasted no time. He sent a messenger to Abigail asking her to become his wife. Abigail did not hesitate, but arose in haste, got on her donkey, attended by five of her maidservants and became his wife. Married to Israel's most illustrious king, Abigail now entered into a happier life. She had a son named Chileab or Daniel (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chr. 3:1). Daniel means: "God is my Judge." Likely the choice of such a name was Abigail's because of the divine care God had granted her (Lockyer p. 25). Abigail married David in faith, not questioning. At this time David had no home and was being pursued by Saul, yet God's promise to him would be fulfilled. Abigail brought to David not only "a fortune in herself," but much wealth useful to David at this time while he was constantly pursued by Saul.

Lessons Learned from David:

Most of us can identify with David because he had "highs" and "lows" as we often do in this life. At times he was completely devoted to God and served Him with all his heart, but we see also that David committed some very serious sins.

David was very upset at Nabal's rejection of his request. He did not hesitate, but immediately strapped on his sword along with his 400 men, and was ready to completely destroy Nabal and his whole household, even the innocent. He was bent on vengeance as a result of Nabal's refusal of help.

We can learn a valuable lesson from this. We should not be quick to anger or to take vengeance. In Proverbs

15:1, we read these wise words, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Harsh, loud words and threats can lead to actions which will be regretted later. In contrast, a soft, calm and carefully thought out reaction can lead to a much different and happier ending. We must remember that God is the judge of all men. Paul wrote, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” and then in verse 21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:19,21).

We also see the other side of David, who gave God thanks for sending him Abigail who saved him from a grievous sin. Most of us do not take correction with thanksgiving nor do we say we are grateful to the one correcting our mistake. David was grateful for this correction that God through Abigail brought to him.

How do we take correction? We all have sinned and fallen short of the Word of God. We are blessed to have elders and our brothers and sisters to help us walk righteously. Are you actively seeking to help your sisters stay on the straight and narrow? Do you really desire to be corrected yourself? Correction can be a wonderful blessing! God has given us a great amount of instruction in His Word on how to correct others and on how to respond to the correction of others. We know God considers admonition, reproof, rebuke, and correction to be vital to our life and work as Christians. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may

be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Others can be blessed through our correction of them and we can be greatly blessed in rightly responding to correction of our own faults and failings. In 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul wrote, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” As God’s children we have a responsibility to help those who are going astray. We read in Matthew 18:15 how we should care for a brother who has sinned against us. We are to tell him his fault and if he hears us, we have gained our brother. Notice we are to go to our brother or sister and tell them their sin, but of course with kindness, love, and an humble spirit. Abigail did a brave and wonderful act for David and saved him from a terrible sin. David took this correction with humility and with gratitude.

Lessons Learned from Nabal:

When we study each of these characters in this chapter, we must remember these were real people like you and I. Nabal, was a very rich man. He is described as harsh, mean and selfish with a violent temper. He owned much land and had many sheep and goats. How did he treat the men sent by David? Remember they had actually protected his shepherds and flocks from the raiding Philistines. He harshly spoke to them and sent them away empty handed.

Giving to others in a time of need is one of the Christian duties that we must not forget. Everything we have is a gift from the Creator. James 1:17 says,

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” God’s grace toward us is abundant. If we would simply stop and take stock of our blessings, we would quickly see how truly overwhelming the Lord’s generosity is toward us. Because we are so blessed, we have a responsibility to share with others.

We must give freely and liberally to the Lord’s church. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). Not only are we to give cheerfully to the church, but we are also to help those in need. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Let us not be greedy and selfish with that which the Lord has given to us. Remember, the Lord loves a cheerful giver!

Another bad habit Nabal had was drinking. In America today, alcohol consumption is at epidemic proportions. According to the website, Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) in the United States:

- Adults (ages 18+): According to the 2015 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 15.1 million adults ages 18 and older (6.2 percent of this age group) had consumed excessive amounts of alcohol. This includes 9.8 million men and 5.3 million women.
- Youth (ages 12–17): an estimated 623,000 adolescents ages 12–17 (2.5 percent of this age group) had alcohol use disorder. This number includes 298,000 males and 325,000 females.

- An estimated 88,000 people (approximately 62,000 men and 26,000 women) die from alcohol-related causes annually, making alcohol the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States. (Alcohol Use Disorder website (2015).

Ladies, we need to carefully teach our children about the sin of alcohol and the devastating results of drinking. Nabal was an excessive drinker and it caused him to be angry, make poor judgments, and finally to have a heart attack. Teach your children the story of Nabal.

Lessons Learned from Abigail: Living in a Difficult Marriage:

Even though we see the trials of Abigail married to this brute of a man, this is not a Scriptural reason for divorce in either the Old or the New Testament. In the very beginning, God gave His marriage law: “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). From the very beginning, God’s law for marriage was one man, one woman for life. One thing we know for sure: being in an unhappy marriage is not Biblical grounds for divorce. In Mark 10:11-12 Jesus said, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” Based on the Bible, we see that people don’t have the right to dissolve an unhappy marriage. God intended that marriage be for a lifetime. Abigail understood God’s law of marriage and was loyal to her husband and even protected him,

even though he treated her with contempt and anger.

One of the great lessons we can learn is that much heartache comes when a Christian is married to an unbeliever. When a husband and wife do not have the same goals in life, trouble will come. When they are not focused on living and working for the Lord, then trouble will come. You might ask the question, “Why did Abigail, a believer in God, marry such an ungodly man? Why did such a kind, compassionate young lady give herself to Nabal?” In Old Testament times, it was the custom that marriages were arranged. A woman had little or no choice. Marriage was a matter of who the parents picked out and made arrangements for their daughters to wed. Here was Nabal a wealthy man with 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats. Abigail’s parents obviously thought this was a good match for their daughter.

Another mistake many people make in marriage is they are more interested in wealth than in the character of the one they plan to marry. Such a marriage usually ends in disaster. Character, particularly Christian character, should always be considered before wealth.

I admire Abigail even more when I think about her marriage being arranged with her having little or no say. She conducted herself with Nabal as God’s marriage laws specified. Abigail was a wise woman. She had learned how to cope with Nabal and how best to approach him. Remember, after she returned from helping David and his men she went to Nabal and there he was holding a feast in his house. The Scriptures tell us, “...Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or much, until

morning light” (1 Sam. 25:36). Then the next morning after Nabal had sobered up, Abigail told him all she had done in helping David. She had learned there was no use talking to him when he was under the influence of alcohol.

Most women in today’s society make their own choice of husbands. However, one may know he has failings, perhaps gambling, drinking, drugs, or knows that he is abusive, and yet she marries him anyway thinking she will change him. This never works, for often, after one is married, these faults become more pronounced. Seldom do they ever get better. Think of those women who made a mistake and have to live with a crude, drunken, or abusive man, yet they accept and live every day with misery. They know God’s will for marriage and they adhere to it despite their suffering. Being in an unhappy marriage is not Biblical grounds for divorce. In Matthew 19:4-6 and then verse nine, we read:

Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So, then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate....And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

God instituted marriage in the beginning. If this law is adhered to, there will be happiness and fulfillment. The children will be content and happy. This is the way

that God would have it. The family is the basic building block of our society. Rampant divorce in our country has a tragic impact on all of us in our culture today.

It takes work to have a happy marriage in our world. We have constant stress with our busy schedules. Technology has filled our homes and while much good can come from these devices, so can much evil seep into our homes. We must constantly work on our relationship with our husbands. We will all have trials and difficult times in our marriages, but in James 1:3-4 we see that deep, abiding joy comes as we persevere through trials, with God's help, and as our faith matures and strengthens.

In Ephesians 5, God has given instructions for husbands and wives. To the husbands, "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." Wives are told, "Submit to your own husband, as to the Lord." If we follow God's plan we will have a happy marriage.

There is no doubt that Abigail was in a difficult marriage, but through her wisdom and trust in God, she did her best to contend with Nabal. For the modern day Abigails who are in a difficult marriage, they must keep in mind the blessings of their reward if they remain faithful to God's law of marriage. In closing I would like to share this poem with you by Grace Easley:

By and by the dreams come true,
Though now things do seem hard for you.
Amid the triumphs and defeats,
You may be sure the circle meets.
By and by each crooked path

Is merely just an aftermath,
And worries that are ours today,
Will be as dust to brush away.

By and by, impatient heart,
The blessed dawn when shadows part,
And there will come the golden years,
Too rich and beautiful for tears.
We won't be bothered any more,
By all that weighed us down before,
For truly, just as Jesus states,
"All things belong to him who waits."

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Read for CONTENT (sentences are complete and make sense) and GRAMMATICAL accuracy

Read for SCRIPTURAL truth (does not teach or imply anything contrary to the Word of God)

Read for eliminating excessive repetition, or make suggestions of what might improve the material

Write “sp” when double spacing after a period leaves a noticeable large space. Spacing before and after an indented quote = 1/2 normal

Periods at end of sentences with a quotation reference should be as follows: the gospel (Rom. 1:16). (No period at end of gospel. Or, as follows: “...sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

Font size for the body of the manuscript: 13 Pt
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Book titles = Italicized

No Roman numerals in Bible books

Initial the mss after you have completed proofing

No quotation marks to be used when indented quote

Books of the Bible NOT to be abbreviated when in sentence
(and no parenthesis)

{T}he may be used when the actual quote is not beginning of sentence

Book abbreviations should be as followed when in parenthesis:

Matthew Mat.

Mark Mark

Luke Luke

John..... John

Acts Acts

Romans Rom.

1 Corinthians..... 1 Cor.

2 Corinthians 2 Cor.

Galatians..... Gal.

Ephesians Eph.

Philippians Phil.

Colossians Col.

1 Thessalonians..... 1 The.

2 Thessalonians..... 2 The.

1 Timothy 1 Tim.

2 Timothy 2 Tim.

Titus Titus

Philemon Phile.

Hebrews Heb.

James..... James

1 Peter 1 Peter

2 Peter 2 Peter

1 John..... 1 John

2 John..... 2 John

3 John..... 3 John

Jude..... Jude

Revelation Rev.

Genesis Gen.

Exodus Exo.

Leviticus Lev.

Numbers Num.

Deuteronomy Deut.

Joshua Josh.

Judges Judg.

Ruth Ruth

1 Samuel 1 Sam.

2 Samuel 2 Sam.

1 Kings..... 1 Kings

2 Kings..... 2 Kings

1 Chronicles..... 1 Chr.

2 Chronicles..... 2 Chr.

Ezra Ezra

Nehemiah Neh.

Esther Est.

Job Job

Psalms..... Psa.

Proverbs Prov.

Ecclesiastes..... Eccl.

Song of Solomon..... Song

Isaiah Isa.

Jeremiah..... Jer.

Lamentations Lam.

Ezekiel Eze.

Daniel Dan.

Hosea Hosea

Joel Joel

Amos..... Amos

Obadiah..... Obad.

Jonah..... Jonah

Micah Micah

Nahum..... Nah.

Habakkuk..... Hab.

Zephaniah Zeph.

Haggai Hag.

Zechariah..... Zech.

Malachi Mal.