

Great Old Testament Questions

Michael Hatcher, Editor

2003 Bellview Lectures

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DEDICATION



Eddie and Maxine Whitten

Franklin Edward Whitten

Eddie Whitten was born May 14, 1927 to Edd and Emily Brownlee Whitten and was raised and baptized into the Baptist Denomination. On November 21, 1945, Eddie married Maxine Sivils. Through the influence of his Christian wife, Eddie obeyed the Gospel on August 29, 1945, being baptized by James Lefan. Brother and sister Whitten had three daughters, all of which are faithful to the Lord's church. Eddie is also a grandfather and great-grandfather. Sister Maxine (along with her mother, Mary Belle Sivils) was killed instantly in a car wreck on March 16, 1990, in North Central Texas, while Eddie was speaking in a lectureship in California. Despite this great personal loss, Eddie has continued to be God's faithful and humble servant.

Brother Eddie is a man of love. He loves the Lord with all his being. He has gone about to put the Lord first in his life (Mat. 6:33). To that end he studied at Brown Trail School of Preaching, graduating in 1969. He returned to the school as administrator for eighteen years and director from 1982-1988. He also directed several of their lectureships and edited some great lectureship books. He has continued to spend his time, money, and his very being in doing what he can to both defend the truth and expand the borders of the kingdom. He travels extensively, preaching in meetings and lectureships both in the states and in foreign fields. In 1991, brother Whitten was instrumental in establishing the Northeast congregation in Hurst, Texas, because he saw that other congregations in that area were not abiding in the doctrine of

Christ (2 John 9-11). He served as preacher of that congregation till recently, retiring as their preacher, but with plans of spending more of his time working with that congregation. He invested in *Firm Foundation* at a critical time in its history and served as its president and business manager, along with being part owner till its editor taught false doctrine in its pages. At that time he severed his relationship with it because he loves God first and foremost.

Brother Whitten is one who enjoys life and is a joy to be with. Because of that nature, he is joked about (possibly more than most) and with. He realizes the Christian life is a life of joy (Phi. 4:4). He said, "If I can't enjoy life as a Christian, then it is not worth living. I like to live, having fun with a purpose and encourage others to enjoy life with me." Eddie is a wonderful example of one who will stand firm on the Rock of Ages and yet exhibit a joy of life and living.

Brother Whitten is also one who is faithful. He is first faithful to God. He has maintained that faithfulness no matter what he has faced in this life. He is faithful to the Lord's church, doing what he can to further its cause in the world. Eddie is one who can be counted on to be faithful to the Word of God. He was a faithful husband to his loving wife Maxine. He is a faithful father, as is seen in the fact that his children are faithful Christians and praise him. How the world needs more faithful men such as brother Whitten!

There are many Christian qualities of which brother Whitten exemplifies within his life. He is kind, generous, patient, loving, faithful, meek, and a soldier in the army of God to name a few. He lives in such a way that he is a good example of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). He has added the Christian graces to his life (2 Pet. 1:5-7). We can sum it up by saying that brother Whitten is a Christian.

As a faithful Christian, brother Whitten looks forward to the reward all the faithful through the ages will receive—that reward of going home to be with Christ (Phi. 1:23). Shortly after the death of his beloved wife, brother Whitten wrote:

Although the pain and anguish left to those who survive is great, the comfort the Scriptures give regarding those who "die in the Lord" is such that a seeming unbearable tragedy has been turned into a wonderful victory for them, and leaves us with a greater desire to partake, ourselves, one day, in that same victory.

It is our great pleasure to lovingly dedicate this book of the 28th Annual Bellview Lectureship, *Great Old Testament Questions*, to Franklin Edward Whitten for his years of faithful service to God, and his friendship with the Bellview congregation.

PREFACE

Questions are one of the great ways to teach vital lessons. As such, one would expect to read many questions as he studies God's Word. He will not be disappointed. In the King James Version one will find 2,273 questions in the Old Testament and 1,024 in the New Testament. While we cannot cover all these questions (and many of them are repetitious), we have selected several, covering a variety of topics. This 28th Annual Bellview Lectureship is being sent forth with the prayer that it will bring a great deal of knowledge and instruction to all who read.

We express our great appreciation to all those who have written chapters for this book. It takes a great deal of time and effort for each of these men. While they do so without any remuneration for their work, they do it, looking for that heavenly city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10). We treasure each of these men for their work's sake, knowing that they are set for the defense of the gospel (Phi. 1:17).

Thanks are also extended to the secretary, Denise Mowery, and her tireless work regarding this book. She sets up and formats each of the chapters and the book itself, and then checks the Scripture references and any other type of errors. We greatly appreciate Gary Summers, who willingly proofs the entire book to help me. While the editor makes all changes, his help and keen eye is invaluable and makes this book grammatically and scripturally correct.

The elders of the Bellview congregation oversee this great work. This work not only began but continues because of their love for God and His Word. While many weary in well doing, these men have remained steadfast through the years. It is our prayer that their tribe might increase.

Without a congregation who faithfully supports the leadership of the bishops, nothing would be done. The Bellview congregation faithfully upholds the elders in the decisions which they make. They do so financially but also with the time and effort. Producing this lectureship is a team effort, with many members working together in harmony to make it the success that it has been through the years. While not great in numbers, they are great in heart and hard work.

It is our prayer that this book will be profitable to each one and that it will help you as you live for Him who died for us.

Michael Hatcher, Director and Editor; March 12, 2003

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“WHO TOLD THEE THOU WAST NAKED?”

GENESIS 3:11

Lynn Parker



Lynn Parker is a native of San Marcos, Texas. He has a B.A. in Bible from Southern Christian University and graduate work from Ft. Hays State University. Lynn has been preaching the Gospel since the age of 14 and is working with the church of Christ at New Braunfels, Texas. He is the Assistant Director of the Spring Bible Institute and a staff writer for *Contending For The Faith*. Lynn has also done local mission work in Virginia.

He and his wife, Mary Ann, have five children: Caroline, Hannah, Garland, Rebekah, and Elijah.

INTRODUCTION

The most effective teachers can use questions to impart knowledge and drive home great lessons. The Bible records questions that were utilized to provoke thought, convict of sin, and teach divine Truth. The opening refrains of God's dealings with our father Adam and mother Eve contain several such questions.

In Genesis 3, there is the account of man's transgression in eating forbidden fruit. Satan presented the opportunity, and, to the shame of mankind, Eve gullibly accepted the sinful proposal. Adam moved from sweet fellowship with God to a state of disobedience when he too ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17-3:6).

After their sin, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. As God walked in the garden that day, He asked, "Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). Of course God knew the physical whereabouts of the first couple. Here again, we see the point well-illustrated: a question is utilized for the purpose of instruction and rebuke. Adam responds to his God: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10). Once again, a question is employed in bringing man to realization of his transgression. The Lord asks, "Who told thee that thou *wast* naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree,

whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” (Gen. 3:11). In fact, because the man and woman had eaten the forbidden fruit, because the fruit “opened their eyes,” they realized their nakedness. The Bible record explicitly states the effects of eating of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden (Gen. 3:3). “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7). So naked and laden with the guilt and shame of sin, Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves from God.

NAKEDNESS AND SHAME

Drunken with fermented wine, Noah was uncovered within his tent. Ham made the nakedness known. Shem and Japheth walked backwards with a garment to cover their father. There is a shame to be associated with nakedness (Isa. 20:4; 47:3; Eze. 16:37; Rev. 3:18; 16:15). It is noteworthy that as Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden: “Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). God intends for man to be clothed.

Modern Application

When God gave explicit directions for the attire of the priests, He directed that even the thigh was to be covered. “And thou shalt make them linen breeches to cover the flesh of their nakedness” (Exo. 28:42). Now here is a pertinent point, and we do not want to miss this. God called the exposure of the thigh nakedness! The *linen breeches* were not for adornment but for modesty. So much for all those shorts that expose the thigh to view!

The covering of their nakedness was an indispensable prerequisite. Aaron and his sons were therefore to receive mik^anaaciym [from kaanac—OT:3664—to cover or conceal, lit., concealers], short drawers, reaching from the hips to the thighs, and serving “to cover the flesh of the nakedness.” For this reason the directions concerning them are separated from those concerning the different portions of the dress, which were for glory and beauty (Keil & Delitzsch).

The human body is not a peep show. The shame of it all is that, today, so many are not ashamed when they should be. “Sexy! Alluring! Provocative!” So read the ads for clothing and swim wear that permeate most every form of media advertising. Our society lives for things that get closer to the *forbidden*, that attract the attention of the opposite sex, and that are just a bit more *daring* so as to show more of the body. Why else would hemlines on skirts go upward? Why do *formal* dresses often

emphasize the bare shoulders? Why are swimsuits, even one-piece suits, skin-tight and showing most, if not all, of the thigh? Why do many shorts expose most of the leg? Why are some dresses and shirts low-cut? Is it not to display more of the body and therefore catch the world's attention? Singers Britney Spears and Shania Twain have influenced an entire generation of young women and girls to bare the midriff and show their belly-buttons. We wish that at least the church was immune from the flesh show so prominent in our society, but sadly, such is not the case.

The World's View of Clothing

There is definitely an element of "sex appeal" in fashion design! Can anyone disagree? Consider some clothing descriptions from a comparatively *tame* advertiser (*Sears' Catalog*). Regarding summer dresses for 1992, Sears advertised two in this fashion:

Beautifully bare, with removable shoulder straps

Scoop neck T-shirt dresses owe their alluring looks to the marvelous cotton and Lycra spandex knit that allows them to hold their shape and cling to yours.

Note their own description of swim wear:

Slim-Allure Suits That Fit

Inspired by lingerie, black 1-piece swimsuit has a lace inset

Create Curvaceous Illusions

Hot Dots Polka Dot Suit. Pretty shirring makes the most of any bustline

U-Wire Bandeau traces cleavage for the small bust. The result is the illusion of extra fullness.

Now, if that is not enough convincing enough to show that designers and retailers have sensuous and lusty goals in mind, then note the following swimsuit ads:

Who says one piece suits aren't sexy? *VENUS* puts that rumor to rest with its front lace up French cut one piece... For those who dare.

Too sexy to be comfortable

lycra/cotton one piece sensation. Sexy enough to make all heads turn!

Sure to be the hottest one piece on the beach!

Sexy and conservative at the same time, this one piece features a hot pink sash.

Attractive and alluring is what best describes our...

Popular triangle top with sexy tonga bottom. Make this suit ‘legal’ with our detachable bottom flap.

The magazine *Young And Modern* (March 1992) has a feature article on the *prettiest* prom dresses entitled, “Night of Your Life.” The article opens with this bold-print statement:

If you only get dressed up once in a blue moon, you want to make it good. So you can get totally prom prepped, here’s a bright, sexy, seriously wearable formal fix you can afford, plus comments from our panel of guys.

Here are some of the remaining page captions, and keep in mind that these statements are from young men who are on a “review panel”:

Short and sexy breaks the tradition of long, souped-up dresses.

Not overdoing it, simple, yet elegant and sexy.

Because she’ll have my attention the whole time.

If you’ve got it, flaunt it, but I’ll protect it.

I like it because it’s flashy without being a wedding gown.

If the girl can wear a super-sexy dress, then hopefully it will make her feel that way.

I like this dress for only one reason... so I can make all the guys jealous.

Does the Bible condone such? Can Christian men and women, Christian boys and girls, wear everything the world wears without sinning? Do we really care about pleasing God in all that we do—in every facet of our daily lives? Can we possibly please God by putting ourselves into places where immodesty is the rule, such as the dance, the summer beach, the public pool, and water-parks (like “Wet & Wild,” “Water World,” or in Texas, the infamous “Schlitterbahn”)?

Paul wrote: “In like manner, that women adorn themselves in **modest apparel**, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment” (1 Tim. 2:9). *Modest* apparel is that which is “decent, proper, well-arranged, or seemly.”

Many ask: “Is it in style?” or “Will it appeal to those who will see it?” We had better use a separate standard to judge our apparel. Let us consider some principles that should be on our minds when judging whether or not our clothing is proper.

Clothing should not cause others to lust. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mat. 5:27-28—

KJV). Brother Thomas Eaves, in his tract *Styles and Modesty*, notes that we have a responsibility to not only keep ourselves from sinful behavior, but also to avoid those things which would cause others to lust. He wrote, “To create lust through our speech, unchaste behavior, recreation (dancing, mixed swimming) or by wearing immodest apparel is to commit the sin of lasciviousness” (11). *Lasciviousness* is defined by Vine as “excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness” (353). Thayer adds to the definition, “wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent physical movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.” (79-80). The Bible teaches that lasciviousness will keep one out of heaven (Gal. 5:19-21). Revealing clothing is revealing for a purpose. It is wrong to do anything whereby another is caused to sin. “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock in his brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13). “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to the weak” (1 Cor. 8:9). Paul wrote:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phi. 4:8).

Clothing must be modest (1 Tim. 2:9). There always exists a standard that the child of God will not dare to violate, and the Christian does not see how close he/she can get to the line without being immodest. Rather, the sincere brother and sister stays completely away from even the questionable! In most every congregation one can find those Christian men and women who always dress modestly; not a soul would ever question whether their dress was appropriate for a child of God. Why is this such a difficult issue with some? Because they want to dress immodestly and yet escape well-deserved rebuke.

Clothing must promote spirituality. “Let us follow after things which make for peace, and **things whereby we may edify one another**” (Rom. 14:19). Christians do not lower themselves to the base desires and pattern of the world. “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). “But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, that ye may show forth the

excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Holiness is not an outdated virtue. It is required of all who would see glory. "Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). No one can wear that which appeals to the sensual desires of our world and be the holy person God demands. Peter was unmistakably clear writing:

As children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in *the time of* your ignorance: but like as he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

Purity of heart is required of every person who would enter into heaven. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat. 5:8). If it is the duty of every saved person to help others be saved as well (and it is), then it is the duty of every child of God to help others possess a pure heart.

"Would I be embarrassed to wear this clothing around spiritual brethren, or in the Lord's presence?" "What influence is wielded by my clothing?" It is indeed true that your *clothing speaks for you*. Your apparel loudly proclaims your character. How inconsistent for parents to want virtuous daughters while all the time allowing their little girls to dress like common tramps! "Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17). "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). Carefully study the following passage in light of the topic under consideration:

Do all things without murmurings and questionings: that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain neither labor in vain (Phi. 2:14-16).

The Public Pool—Should I Go?

One might ask, "But what if I dress modestly—can I go to mixed swimming parties then?" There are two matters to consider there:

- (1) What is the predominant dress of others?
- (2) Will my Christian influence be helped or hindered by mixed swimming?

Unless others have been taught (and few have), it is unlikely that mixed swimming occasions will produce much in the way of decent,

modest apparel. Quite the opposite! The beach and the public pool abound in scantily clad men and women. Living in the world, there are some things we cannot escape—such as immodest apparel in the grocery store, the gas station, and on the street. However, we do not have to frequent those places where it is the norm! One might have to view a drinker consuming a beer as he walks down the road, but he does not have to go to the local tavern where drinking abounds! The problem then is not with male and female swimming together but with the lack of clothing that goes with mixed swimming, thereby giving occasion for impure, lustful thoughts. If folks swim with modest apparel, the problem is solved, but ordinarily, they do not. Why would a Christian want to be at a place where such was the case? Are we not willing to *sacrifice* a swim at certain times and in certain places where the clothing is scanty? Romans 15:1 teaches us to think of others and “not to please ourselves.” Let us never be “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). Remember that pure religion before God requires us to be unsoiled by the world’s influence: “Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Jam. 1:27).

Then, too, the child of God is continually watching his/her influence. What does my presence here say to God? To the world? To the weak brother or sister who might see me here? Paul wrote, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). “Flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

As Christians, there are certain things that we give up as we leave behind an old life of sin (Rom. 6:4) to follow Christ Jesus. The inspired apostle reminds us of the change: how we no longer conduct ourselves as those in the world, and how the world views Christians as, well, somewhat odd because of their pure lifestyle. Consider carefully this passage:

Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that ye no longer should live the rest of your time in flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and

abominable idolatries: wherein they think strange that ye run not with *them* into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (1 Pet. 4:1-4).

Men and Boys, Too?

The Bible sets an acceptable standard of righteousness and moral conduct for one and all. It may be the case that the man's responsibility in regard to modest clothing has not been emphasized enough in some instances. Let us clearly state that modesty is for men, too! It is certainly possible for women to lust after men, and running around bare-chested, or in thigh-revealing shorts, or in sweat-pants that are tight and revealing is wrong! Now we are not speaking about that worn in private, but rather that which is worn in places where others are exposed to scenery they just ought not to see!

“Some People Just Have Dirty Minds!”

Now, it is true that some gutter minds will lust after a pretty young lady or handsome young man regardless of what they are wearing. The one lusting is always wrong in God's sight! However, please realize that an immodestly clad person can contribute to sin, and in so doing, this immodest person transgresses God's will concerning modesty, influence, and not putting an occasion to sin before others.

Voices of Concern

It might be helpful to know that though this sin recurs in every generation, there are indeed brethren that are determined to be careful, be modest, and be set apart from the world. Some Christian brothers and sisters that once wore immodest apparel tell us that upon learning more of God's will, they saw the necessity to change. Several years ago a young Christian woman wrote the following paper. She is now a Christian wife and mother.

In Retrospect

It was not very long ago that summer meant cooler clothes for me. I reveled in the wearing of shorts and the tan that I got on bare legs. I had a sense of modesty, though, that I thought to be on the highest spiritual plain. My parents reared us “in the church” and instilled what I thought were great senses of morality in us, although some of the direction they gave to our young lives was inappropriate. You would never have caught me wearing things such as a tank top, a halter-top, or a cropped top (that showed a bare tummy), although it was not unusual for me to have on shorts that were as short or shorter than those of any other girl in school. For some reason, I failed to view bare legs as being in the realm of immodesty; I was more concerned about my upper body being adequately covered.

Summertime days brought our visits to the town's swimming pool. Mama and Daddy obviously approved of such swimming since they paid for the membership and took us there each week. Again, I thought I exercised great judgment in modesty when I would not wear a bikini, although I had one. I had picked one out that had a matching t-shirt and I always wore the shirt over the swimsuit. Naturally, it came down barely to the bottom of the bikini pants, and again my legs were completely bare all the way to the hip.

During my high school years, I served as a twirler, with my parents' full support and pride. Despite the suggestive movements commonly referred to as "dance twirls," I continued in this capacity until I graduated. The first year I twirled, our uniforms were flashy sequined "dresses" whose length came just below the trunk of the body and bloomers were worn under it. The remaining years of my tenure were spent wearing a tight-fitting sequined one-piece leotard (somewhat similar to a one-piece bathing suit). At first, I balked at this design, arguing that it was too immodest, but I was overruled by the other twirlers and majority ruled in our selection of uniforms. (Ironically, the leotard left uncovered very little that had not already been uncovered with the previous year's uniform!) Soon the whistles and admiring looks from young men made me forget my embarrassment at wearing such clothing, and I began to like the attention I got from male counterparts.

I was asked by a Christian friend at some point after leaving high school if it ever crossed my mind that some of the men might be caused to lust after me in my twirling uniform. As honestly as I could, I replied that at the time my sentiments were "I certainly hoped so! That was the whole point of it!" I was not an unattractive girl and I enjoyed being told that—whether it was in complimentary words or sidelong, approving glances and looks!

One kind, older Christian lady in the local congregation mentioned to my mother that I should not participate in such activity because of the uniform required. When my mother passed this comment on to me, I was furious. How dare this woman imply that I was not spiritually minded and that I was participating in worldly events! Rather than being open-minded to see if she spoke "as the oracles" of the Lord, I remained angry and headstrong.

Somewhere along the line, shortly after high school, a friend helped me to see, in light of Bible principles, that my attire had not been pleasing to the Lord and that some of my activities (such as the twirling, and mixed swimming) had allowed me to participate in things that were sinful. Never have I been so ashamed as I was the day I realized the poor example I set for others and the disapproval the Lord must have felt for my actions over those years. I have made such a drastic change in these areas, and am grateful my life has been spared

so that I might make these changes. From that day forward, I have never worn another pair of shorts in public. While I believe there can be some shorts that are modest, I’m convinced the Bible teaches the Lord would rather His people take a “better safe than sorry” attitude and be part of that peculiar people which Scripture mentions. [Something to keep in mind, though, when wearing shorts—or a skirt for that matter—is that shorts and a skirt do not stay the same length when one sits down and an exposed leg while seated is just as exciting as while standing!] Additionally, all my dresses and skirts now come well below my knee, and I have become quite proficient at adding ruffles and lace to the bottom to lengthen them. One member of my own family has referred to me as a “fanatic” but in light of all I stand to gain or lose on the day of Judgment, I cannot think of being less cautious.

It was a bitter pill for me to swallow in realizing that while my parents loved me, cared for me, and wanted me to go to Heaven, that was not enough to outweigh their poor judgment in allowing me to wear immodest apparel, to swim in public places where no one was properly clothed, and to twirl. I could not base my salvation and eternal abode on what my parents considered appropriate or inappropriate—I had to base my life on God’s word, and be obedient thereto.

My mother still carries one of my twirling pictures in her wallet, along with several other school pictures from my high school days. I have tried repeatedly to get that picture from her and destroy it. It represents a time and an activity in my life of which I am deeply ashamed, and it is something which I relate only in an effort to teach and encourage some other young lady so that she might refrain from the sins I committed. Now, after years of growth and maturity, I finally realize the love involved for the older Christian lady to mention her concerns to my mother.

Honest hearts are hard to find. We have not seen an abundance of people that wear immodest and revealing clothing willing to change. Examples like this seem to be rare, and worldliness is captivating.

Real Life Tragedies

In contrast to the previous example, one couple in the church not only condoned, but promoted their daughter’s participation in a drill team where short skirt uniforms were worn and dance routines performed. The skirts had *bloomers* underneath but displayed the entire leg, from “Dan to Beersheba.” High-kicks left nothing to the imagination. These parents proudly invited other members to watch their daughter perform. The watching brethren were shocked and reprimanded the family. The elders reprimanded the family and said such would not be tolerated in the church. Scriptural principles were ex-

plained, the truth was set forth, and the parents responded defensively and with anger. The mother argued that the drill team and uniform was good for her daughter's self-esteem. The father argued that you could not determine what was modest and what was not. You can imagine what subsequently occurred. Sweet fellowship was destroyed because of a family's worldly lusts and effort to rationalize the indefensible.

Can we see that cheerleading, drill teams, and many athletic events require participants to wear that which the true Christian cannot?

In another instance, a young mother was so insistent that her daughter "fulfill her dream" of being an Olympic swimmer that she refused to even honestly study or discuss the scriptural principles involved. Apparently when brethren cannot defend a position, the frequent reaction is to move to another congregation, and believe me, there are plenty of congregations where topics like modest apparel, dancing, drinking, and other worldly practices are never mentioned from the pulpit or in the classroom. To do so would upset the status quo and create ripples. Forget the ripples—God give us more wave-making preachers, teachers, and elders!

CONCLUSION

Garland Elkins once said, "There are many defenders of immodest apparel but no defense." Let us not try to justify the wrong, the worldly, the sensual, the daring, the provocative, the sexy, the alluring, or even the questionable.

There might be some honest, humble, tender-hearted souls in the church that wear immodest apparel because they have never been taught, or because they have never considered the consequences of their actions. It is for these *teachable* brethren that this effort is sent forth.

Once a woman in a congregation objected to a sermon on modesty by retorting, "The preacher must be the one with the filthy heart if he has a problem with clothing." Tragically, such statements are not isolated incidents, and more than one preacher has been invited to leave for preaching against immodest apparel. Yet, such arguments (?) display a serious ignorance of the Bible and weaken society, the home, and the church. The preacher preaches against improper dress because (1) the Bible teaches such is sin, and (2) sin keeps one out of heaven, and (3) every preacher "worth his salt" wants folks in heaven. It is as simple as that!

Many will no doubt continue on in their worldly practices and consider those of us who raise objections as *old-fashioned* or opinionated. These will defend immodesty, refuse to change for the sake of the Lord, and they may even resent those who speak to them on the subject. Truth is not always comfortable, but then we note also that a sincere heart is willing to change; the stubborn soul continues proudly, willfully on in sin. The truth of the matter is that immodest apparel is not a matter of opinion but a matter to be decided by sound, scriptural principles.

If you are not already in the practice, **put on some clothes!**

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“AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?”

GENESIS 4:9

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INTRODUCTION

No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.

If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
As well as if a promontory were,
as well as if a manor of thy friend’s
or of thine own were.

Any man’s death diminishes me
Because I am involved in mankind,
and therefore never send to know
for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.

John Donne, “Meditation 17”

Ever since Cain first asked, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” (Gen. 4:9), people have wondered how much, if any, responsibility they should have toward each other. In advice columns we read about parents who exert pressure on their married children to live in certain ways. At the other extreme are those who do not even care to see their grandchildren. We read of a particular kind of neighbor who makes a nuisance out of herself with daily visits. Some people write in to complain that people are evangelistic with them and that they should mind their own

business. Some parents are incensed that someone else corrected their child while others lament that various parents never seem to take care of their own offspring. While some are pegged with being nosy, pushy, and obnoxious, others are accused of being aloof, standoffish, and unfriendly.

This chapter will not resolve all of those issues, but it will look at biblical principles that provide insight into what God expects of us. Even though Cain’s original question was asked in a sarcastic and defensive manner, it is nevertheless a legitimate query. The poet John Donne affirmed that he was “involved in mankind,” and he implies that all others are, also—whether or not they wish to be. Genesis 1:26 does mention that mankind is made in the image and likeness of God. We are all related initially in Adam and Eve and later through Noah and his wife (10:1).

THE TEXT

The context of the question of this chapter is found in Genesis 4. Cain and Abel were brothers who grew up in a home that consisted of a father and mother, and possibly other brothers and sisters, which are not mentioned at this time (5:4). There were no aunts, uncles, or grandparents to spoil the lads—let alone abusive stepparents. Although both boys shared the same environment, one turned out to be godly and the other ungodly. When Cain’s offering was rejected, he became angry (4:5). He refused to control himself—even with God’s encouragement—and murdered his brother in cold blood.

Just as God called his parents to account for their sin, so the Creator of the world began to deal with Cain. “Where is Abel thy brother?” (4:9). Both God and Cain know the answer to that question; the former is giving the latter a chance to confess. Certainly, he knows from his parents’ teaching that it is impossible to keep any words or actions from Him. Their attempts to hide (3:8, 10) had proven futile. Furthermore, if God knew that he was angry over the rejection of his offering, Cain must expect that God has witnessed the fratricide.

Rather than be overwhelmed by his guilt, which might have caused him to be humble and apologetic, he responds in a flippant and sarcastic manner: “I know not: *Am I my brother’s keeper?*” (4:9). God wastes no more time with subtle inquiries. He states plainly that He knows where Abel is—and what has happened to him: “What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (4:10).

The Lord does not wait for a reply. He pronounces a curse upon him and tells him the manner in which he will be punished (4:11-12). Cain whines, “My punishment *is* greater than I can bear” (4:13) and protests that everyone will want to kill him (4:14—paraphrased). Never does he express one word of remorse for his conduct.

THE CHARACTER OF CAIN

Cain is certainly not the person any of us would choose to pattern ourselves after. Paul commands: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phi. 3:17). It stands to reason that, if we should imitate the conduct of the righteous, we should also avoid the behavior of the ungodly. Therefore, we note briefly some of the bad characteristics of Cain.

Dominated by Emotion

“*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city*” (Pro. 16:32). The same Hebrew word translated “rule” in this verse is the one God used in Genesis 4:7, when He told Cain that sin’s desire was for him but that he should *rule* over it. We have no way of knowing what efforts Abel’s brother made to practice self-control, but he lost the struggle in colossal fashion. Giving way to one’s emotion may feel good for a moment, but the consequences can be more costly than one can possibly conceive. As a punishment, Cain lost what he loved most—tilling the ground; it would no longer yield to his loving care. He would always be a fugitive and a vagabond (Gen. 4:11-12).

Too often young people, governed by emotion, have lost their virtue and ended up being parents much sooner than they planned. Others may have stolen upon an impulse and spent years in prison for their hasty decision. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders walked in the footsteps of Cain in their irrational and fanatical determination to put to death Jesus. They went so far as to foolishly insist: “His blood *be* on us, and on our children” (Mat. 27:25). No wonder Solomon wrote, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered (Pro. 28:26).

When passion rules, people do not think or act rationally; they do things that they later regret. Emotion clouds and overpowers good judgment. As with the Lord or with Stephen, intense feelings will cause people to violate civil law, God’s morality, and scriptural ethics in an effort to have one’s way—regardless of the consequences to all in-

volved. Eldershops have become divided, preachers have been fired, and congregations have been torn asunder because of someone’s passionate commitment to an idea or a conclusion reached on an emotional basis.

Cain is the father of all who operate in that manner. It was his fault that his sacrifice was rejected by God; he had the power to do well, but he resented his brother because of his success. Rather than determine to do better himself and follow his brother’s good example, he allowed envy and bitterness to gain control of him. He developed tunnel vision: all he could see was that the destruction of Abel would somehow solve his problems. In reality, his actions only created more problems for himself and left him in a worse position than before.

Arrogant and Insolent

Cain’s arrogance can be seen by the fact that he thought he could hide his deed from God. Did he bury Abel, or just hide his body in the bushes? Did he try to remove all traces of his brother’s blood? Whatever he did, his efforts were vain. God asks him: “What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10). If God observed Adam and Eve taking a bite of fruit, what are the odds that He not miss one of the few human beings upon the earth?

People are just as arrogant today. They sin under the cover of darkness, thinking that their deeds are somehow hidden from God. David knew better than that:

If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee* (Psa. 139:11-12).

Those who have any awareness at all can grasp that point. Elihu knew this fact: “For his eyes *are* upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. *There is* no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves” (Job 34:21-22). Years later Isaiah would warn: “Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isa. 29:15). If someone today were to be so foolish as to say, “But there are more than six billion people in the world today; that is a lot more to keep up with,” it would only show that they are likewise deficient in their understanding of God.

Actually, many no longer wait until the cover of darkness any more; they are so bold and arrogant as to flaunt their sinful behavior even in the daylight, as evidenced by the vile and shameful conduct associated

with some of the “homosexual rights” parades. Yes, they “count it pleasure to riot in the day time” (2 Pet. 2:13). Many think that God either does not exist or that He does not care. God has always existed, and He always cares about the deeds of men, as evidenced by the fact that He holds us accountable (2 Cor. 5:10).

Cain’s insolence is seen in his flippant response to God’s inquiry about his brother: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” How might he have answered? He could have expressed sorrow and thrown himself upon God’s mercy: “You know what I did, don’t you? I don’t know what came over me; I lost my head. I deserve whatever punishment you see fit to bring upon me. I am guilty and cannot undo what I have done.” In a more daring response he might have tried to maintain a facade of ignorance and told a simple lie: “I know not. We were supposed to meet a while ago, but he did not show up.”

Instead, he not only lies; he throws the question under consideration back at God, adding a bit of sardonic sass to it. The word translated “keeper” is used quite often in the Old Testament. The root of the word means “prop. To *hedge* about (as with thorns), i.e. *guard*; gen. to *protect*, *attend to*, etc.:—beware, be circumspect, take heed (to self), keep... mark” (Strong #8104). It is the word God used when He told Adam to dress and *keep* the garden (Gen. 2:15). God also uses the word when He speaks to Abraham, “Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore” (Gen. 17:9). It is the word used when Moses admonishes the people not to add to or take away from the Word of God, “that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deu. 4:2).

Being a *keeper*, therefore, involves very careful responsibilities. One must observe what is commanded or needs to be done, and there is an element of protection and guarding involved. To be a *keeper* of one’s brother would mean that one must observe what things would be in his best interests (1 The. 5:15) and to do for him what could be done in a positive way. It also would involve shielding him from harm, as much as possible. Therefore, Cain’s question is even more impertinent: he was not only **not** his brother’s keeper; he was his brother’s destroyer.

Impenitent

The first human murderer expresses no remorse whatsoever for his display of unnatural affection; his only concern is about himself. He is not the last person, however, to be primarily interested in saving his own hide. His seed line seems to follow his arrogant attitude. Lamech boasted to his wives, Adah and Zillah: “For I have killed a man for

wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:23-24—NKJV). Lamech had concocted his own system of justice. It was not "an eye for an eye"; it was death for an eye. Whatever the wound was, it did not merit death, but Lamech killed a human being in return. Then he bragged about his exceeding depravity!

Lamech also introduced the evil of polygamy into the world. Eventually, through the influence of Cain, Lamech, and their descendants, the world became more and more evil, that "every imagination of the thoughts" of man's heart was "only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5), which prompted God to destroy the world through a worldwide flood. How different the world might have been if Cain had repented and turned to God for forgiveness! Our actions and even our attitudes matter considerably; future generations may be affected by what we think, say, and do. They will be encouraged to be either godly or ungodly depending on our legacy. It is inevitable that we will make mistakes (although probably not as grave as Cain's); the important thing is that we repent and return to God.

THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

Disregarding Cain's disrespectful attitude in asking the question, let us consider the question he posed as if it were a genuine inquiry: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*"

Old Testament Examples

The Old Testament furnishes instances of both loving and unbrotherly conduct. Jacob and Esau, for example, always seemed to be at cross purposes. Jacob took advantage of and defrauded his brother; Esau (in return) was heavily interested in vengeance. Joseph's brothers, although somewhat provoked, lacked love and compassion toward him.

Moses must have felt like his brother's keeper when he came to the rescue of one of his fellow Israelites: when "he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren," he "he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand" (Exo. 2:11-12). For his attempt to be his brother's keeper, he was the next day asked by his brethren: "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (Exo. 2:14). Moses made the mistake of supposing that "his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them" (Acts 7:25). Instead of being a powerful ally to his people, Moses fled and was discouraged from being his brothers' keeper for forty years. One wonders how many young men

have been discouraged from preaching, teaching, and song leading by unkind and critical brethren. As someone once quipped: “No good deed ever goes unpunished.” Brethren ought to be ashamed for being anything less than their brother’s keeper.

Obadiah is worthy of praise for keeping one hundred prophets alive. While they hid in caves out of fear that Queen Jezebel would kill them, he literally *kept* them alive with bread and water (1 Kin. 18:4, 13). Both Michal (Saul’s daughter and David’s wife) and Jonathan (Saul’s son) *kept* David from being killed by their mad father by helping him escape (1 Sam. 19:12-17; 20:1-42).

A contrast in ideologies occurs between the husband and wife, Nabal and Abigail. The former felt that he had no obligation to David or his men, and he refused to be of help (1 Sam. 25:10-11). Not only did he fail to be a *keeper*, he also flunked gratitude, since David’s men had protected his household and possessions (25:16). Fortunately, his wife was both wiser and more generous. She graciously gave the provisions David and his men needed, thus avoiding the destruction that David had determined upon the churlish knave. Obviously, one need not be a literal brother to be a *keeper*.

Most of these examples have been of fellow Israelites, who are brethren by race, rather than after the order of Cain and Abel. Therefore, the obligation is broader than one’s own family. It widens even more, however, to include the entire family of man. God has, for example, through his prophets *kept* Gentiles, such as the widow in Zidon (1 Kin. 17:9-24) and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kin. 5:1-19), as Jesus pointed out (Luke 4:24-27).

Surprisingly, such care has worked the other way around, also. When Jeremiah’s fellow Israelites decided to *keep* him about like Cain did Abel, putting him in a dungeon where he sank into the mire and would surely have perished, it was a eunuch from Ethiopia named Ebed-melech who preserved him from death. Imagine, a Gentile having to save the prophet from the deeds of his own kinsmen, according to the flesh (Jer. 38:1-13)! Surely, we have a responsibility toward all—not just someone closely related by blood.

The New Testament

How vividly did Jesus establish this point in His illustration of what we term the “Good Samaritan”? Although the question He was answering was: “Who is my neighbor?” it is still the case that we are

debtors to all men (Rom. 1:14-16). Spiritually, we owe all the opportunity to hear the Gospel. With people’s physical needs we are charged to “do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Jesus even taught that we are to love our enemies (Mat. 5:44). The one who pleases God **acts** neighborly and brotherly.

The New Testament describes ways in which we can be our brothers’ keepers. Below are twenty passages which provide positive things we can do for each other; these are followed by ten things we must avoid.

1. “Love one another” (Rom. 13:8; John 13:34-35; 15:12-13). Love is the one thing we **owe** all men. We may not eagerly embrace this doctrine, but the Lord has laid it upon us anyway. If some are not very lovable, we must realize that such a quibble is irrelevant. We are to love our brethren **as** Jesus loved us. He loved His disciples when their attitudes were wrong (wanting to destroy Samaria, for instance, Luke 9:51-56), when they were immature (arguing over who would be greatest amongst themselves, Mark 9:34), or when they deserted Him and fled (Mark 14:50). Even Peter’s denial (Mark 14:66-72) could not deter Him from dying on the cross for his sins—and all who have ever denied Him (Rom. 5:8).

John, the apostle of love, wrote, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God” (1 John 4:7). He also points out: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). Whereas we probably think it is easier to love God than our fellow human beings (and possibly some brethren)—God’s view is just the opposite: “For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20). Leslie B. Flynn, in the book, *Great Church Fights*, included the following rhyme:

To dwell above with saints we love,
That will be grace and glory.
To live below with saints we know;
That’s another story! (Swindoll 32).

Although those four lines reflect our feelings at certain times, nevertheless we know that love must prevail. Many have allowed their brethren to turn into enemies, even though John writes that the one who hates “his brother is in darkness”; such a miserable soul even **walks** in darkness (1 John 2:11). He also becomes a murderer and is devoid of

eternal life (1 John 3:15). Loving one another is one of the hardest commandments we have been given to keep.

Furthermore, to love someone involves more than just refraining from doing him harm. Although we might consider such restraint a mighty achievement, there remain the positive actions that love requires: “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Incorrect is the disposition that mistakes for love the absence of expressed ill will toward another; good will must be exercised. Jesus taught the importance of positive expression: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12).

2. Brethren should be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10). According to Vincent, the Greek word, *philostorgoi*, means “the natural love of kindred” (3:159). He also adds: “The word here represents Christians as bound by a family tie.” Occasionally, the idea has been presented that we must love our brethren, but we do not have to like them. How easy is it, however, to be kindly affectioned to someone we cannot personally stand to be around? Perhaps avoidance is a helpful temporary solution, but this verse indicates that we can control our feelings. Those who say they cannot help the way they feel are mistaken. Wounds created by strife take a while to heal, but they can be overcome. “*Let love be without dissimulation*” (Rom. 12:9). The preceding prepositional phrase is generally translated *unfeigned*. Our love for one another cannot be faked; it must be genuine.

3. Christians are commanded to “in honor” prefer one another (Rom. 12:10). Literally, this phrase means “leading the way in showing the honor that is due” (Vincent 3:159). Nearly half a century ago Teresa Brewer’s song, “Mutual Admiration Society,” (from the musical *Happy Hunting*), played on radios across the nation during November and December of 1956. The theme involved a pair of young lovers (in the innocent sense of the expression) who spent all their time complimenting and building each other up. This depiction ought to describe the church. These sentiments cannot be phony; they must be real and genuine. Petty jealousies, typified by Saul’s attitude toward David’s success in killing Goliath, have no place in the church. We ought to encourage one another to excel and rejoice in each other’s accomplishments. Perhaps at times we focus too much on what is wrong and not

enough on the things that are right and done well. Appropriate admiration for one another is itself admirable.

4. Members of the body of Christ should be "of the same mind one toward another" (Rom. 12:16). James talked about the problem of favoritism with respect to the poor and the rich (Jam. 2:2-4). We know better, but we do not always live up to our knowledge. A friend of this writer visited a congregation, and after worship he stood at the back door. He was dressed in blue jeans, but they were clean (and all he had at the moment). Person after person passed by and never said a word. Perhaps they would have ignored him also if he had been wearing a brand new suit, but likely this was a social decision: "He is not very well dressed; let us just pretend we do not see him." Members should be interested in everyone who visits.

Another problem is the formation of cliques. Of course, in a large congregation, everyone cannot know everyone, but all too often the same members visit with each other and have no idea about the rest (or who may have visited that day). Special friendships within the body of Christ are bound to form, but these cannot be an excuse to remain within a shell. Occasionally, after a few months of being absent, someone will say, "Whatever happened to brother...?" If a finger were cut off from anyone's physical body, chances are the other members would know before half a year elapsed. We must avoid exalting some and discounting other Christians.

5. As brethren, we must receive one another (Rom. 15:7). We do not all think alike. Tastes vary; preferences differ. We must co-exist peacefully in matters of judgment and not allow disagreements to interrupt fellowship or cause us to think less of one another. In a small Pennsylvania city, whose population is less than 10,000, sit two large church buildings on opposite corners in the heart of town. Both of the buildings belonged to Presbyterian groups. The history behind these two structures is probably a very interesting one, but in the mid-1970s both groups had shrunk to the size of 60 and 100 respectively. When this writer met one of the attendees, he asked, "Why don't the two groups unite?" She replied, "Well, when our ladies get together for lunch, we like to eat out; their ladies like to bring their own lunches." Oh. Now it all makes sense. What a great barrier to unity! And some of us have been about as foolish! Matters of opinion and judgment should not disrupt fellowship; we must receive one another.

6. We also have a responsibility to “edify [one] another” (Rom. 14:19; 1 The. 5:11). Our desire should be that peace reign in the body (as much as possible). Toward that end we should try to build each other up in the faith. In Corinth the brethren wanted to showcase their own spiritual gifts by speaking in tongues, but Paul explained that edifying each other was far more valuable (1 Cor. 14:12-19).

7. Christians have an obligation “to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). To some this may seem like a negative precept, but its effects are positive. If we were traveling on a road in which the bridge ahead of us had been washed away, would we not desire to be warned? If we are headed for spiritual disaster, we should likewise appreciate the one who is bold enough to say something. Most people dislike confrontation; it is easier for them to be silent. As Solomon wrote: “Open rebuke *is* better than secret love. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend” (Pro. 27:5-6). We would be wise to listen to just criticism—regardless of the source. “A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent” (Pro. 15:5). Admonitions should be offered in the proper spirit—as kindly as we know how to give them, but remaining quiet when a warning would have averted sorrow will not endear us to anyone.

8. It only stands to reason that brethren would “salute” or “Greet ye one another” (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20). *Salute* and *greet* are from the same Greek word. This command may seem the most obvious of all, but the Holy Spirit through Paul makes the point repeatedly. Part of the reason may be that prejudice would prevent some brethren from wanting to publicly associate with others, based on race, wealth, appearance, or social standing (as previously discussed). A brother in Christ, however, takes precedence over all others to whom we may have grown close—by virtue of His blood. Spiritual bonds are stronger and more permanent than physical ones; our Lord said, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mat. 12:50). Brethren should never be ashamed to “greet one another.”

9. Members of the body of Christ should have the same care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25). Paul uses the analogy of the physical body to make a point about Christ’s spiritual body—the church. If a member of our physical body is ailing (a broken arm or a pulled hamstring, for example), the other members of the body are concerned and do whatever they can to compensate for the duration. Again, there must be no

discrimination concerning the problematic member. The physical body stands ready to cooperate whether the pain is in the toe or in the heart. Likewise, the same care should exist toward church members, whether they are highly visible or lesser known. The song, "God's Family," highlights this relationship, in which "sometimes we laugh together" and "sometimes we cry." Some congregations pull themselves apart when they ought to be pulling together as one unit.

10. Love for one another demands that brethren "serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Certainly, it is the philosophy of the world to ask: "What can you do for me?" Just as Jesus' teachings in the *beatitudes* do not coincide with the world's notions of joy, neither does His philosophy of inter-personal relationships. Many people hold the utilitarian view of: "I want you around if you can do something for me." But God says, in effect: "Do not worry about what others can do for you; determine what you can do for them." We live in a society that is self-absorbed, always concerned about getting what they think they deserve, fussing about entitlements, and suing others to hold them accountable for their own misbehavior and life-altering decisions. The *golden rule* has vanished from the public view, but in the church we are free to be unselfish, kind, and caring—joyous and satisfied to serve one another.

11. Brethren ought to bear "one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). There are many types of burdens that life thrusts upon us: from the loss of a loved one to difficulties at the workplace or with family members—things that often cannot be changed or improved—only endured. Spiritually speaking, some may be burdened with past sins they have committed; others may be facing current temptations. A few might be at the point of despair: They have tried overcoming obstacles to the faith and have been too weak to succeed; they have just given up. What a difference a brother or a sister might make in the life of one who feels alone, as if "no man cared for my soul" (Psa. 142:4). We can seldom solve each other's problems, but we can be a source of encouragement and function as burden-bearers.

12. Far too often Christians have fallen short in "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13). How ironic that in the world tolerance has been over-emphasized, but in the church it has been under-rated! Some are too quickly critical, and some are too easily offended. How many times do we make judgments concerning our brethren based on superficial things like hobbies or favorite singers? When disagreements arise, how swiftly does the matter become an *us*

versus *them* situation? Healthy doses of humility, meekness, and patience would help us to forbear (Eph. 4:2). Our brethren are never going to be any more perfect than we are; they will never live up to our expectations of them any more than we will never fail to disappoint them. We must anticipate that conflicts will arise and be prepared to forbear one another.

13. Closely associated with forbearance is “forgiving one another” (Col. 3:13). Sometimes, it almost seems as if some are on the lookout for possible offenses being committed against them. One lady stewed all week because this writer did not visit her daughter in the hospital; had she paid attention to the announcements (written or oral), she would have known that he was at camp in another state during that time period. Some imagine slights and insults that were never intended; such attitudes do not reflect a proper disposition toward brethren. A forgiving person dismisses immediately those nagging thoughts that a fellow Christian has transgressed against him. The Lord gave us a way to clear up ambiguous situations: talk to the suspected offender—alone! If there was nothing to it, no one else needs to know. If there is a real problem, take others to establish the facts (Mat. 18:15-17). When mistakes are made, on our part we need to repent of them; when others sin against us and repent, we must extend the same forgiveness we would want for ourselves. If God cannot despise a humble and contrite heart, neither should we (Psa. 51:16-17). Let us forgive those who have trespassed against us (Mat. 6:12, 14-15).

14. Members of the body of Christ should be “kind one to another, tenderhearted” (Eph. 4:32). This command involves more than just abstaining from harming someone. We cannot merely refrain from evil and then deduce that we have been kind. We should determine to say something of a positive nature to others. A kind word costs little, but it provides a lift to others. Gratuitous flattery will be seen for what it is; sincerity must accompany kindness. How many days have been made brighter by opening an appreciation card with some encouraging comments inside? It is always helpful to know that, despite whatever problems we are facing at the moment, our brethren care about us.

15. An extension of kindness is hospitality. Brethren are commanded: “*Be hospitable to one another without grumbling*” (1 Pet. 4:9—NKJV). How interesting that being hospitable might cause one to grumble! Not only must we practice it; we must like it, too. Christians are to be “given to hospitality” in general (Rom. 12:13), and it is one of

the qualifications of an elder (1 Tim. 3:2), as well as a widow who was to receive support from the church (5:10). Acts of hospitality included providing a place to stay (along with the amenities) and furnishing food for guests. What possessions do we have that God has not blessed us with? Should these be reserved for ourselves alone or put to use on the Lord’s behalf? Brethren need to be invited into our homes; the fellowship strengthens the body of Christ.

16. Christians also have a responsibility to comfort and exhort one another (1 The. 5:11). The same Greek word is translated either way in both its noun and verb forms (*parakleesis* and *parakaleo*). Barnabas is known chiefly for his comforting and exhortation; he is called the “son of consolation” (KJV) or the “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36—NKJV). The Holy Spirit is known as the Comforter (John 14:26), but we are also to comfort one another with such things as the doctrine of Christ’s second coming (1 The. 4:18). We are able to console one another in times of tribulation, as Paul wrote:

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

This word also includes an emphasis upon exhortation and is used in 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.” It is the same word used describing our responsibility to prohibit brethren from forsaking the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). We ought always to be an available help to each other in terms of comfort and exhortation.

17. Of course, the above expressions of love work best if we are willing to submit ourselves “one to another in the fear of God” (Eph. 5:21). We know that we are to submit ourselves to God (Jam. 4:7) and that the church is commanded to be “subject unto Christ” (Eph. 5:24), but how can we all “be subject one to another” (1 Pet. 5:5)? That same verse advises us to be “clothed with humility.” When we are exhorted or rebuked, we should not become defensive (which is so easy to do), combative, or vengeful. We should realize that someone has loved us enough and taken his time to communicate to us a problem to which we need to respond. One time this writer was approached by a brother with some criticism, which was not initially received favorably. He then

said, “Look, I did not have to take my time to drive over here and talk to you about this; it would have been easier to stay home and say nothing.” Ouch! He was right; submitting ourselves to one another is in our own best interests. The best friend we will ever have is the one who, knowing that we might not take it well, will nevertheless rebuke us.

18. James writes, “Confess *your* faults one to another” (Jam. 5:16). This command does not authorize “prayer partners” or require brethren to elicit details from each other that no one needs to know about their pasts or their private lives or their thoughts. However, when sinful behavior has been exhibited or error has been taught, then the person in question must admit, not deny, what he has done. Brethren who are willing to forgive (as all should be) can put the problem aside quickly—if it is acknowledged. Although the following situations were in the world and not the church, we should profit from both of them. President Richard Nixon refused to confess his knowledge in the Watergate burglaries; had he acknowledged an error in judgment and apologized, he might have completed his term of office. Bill Clinton likewise chose to stonewall and obstruct justice, which resulted in his impeachment, and no one will ever forget his public lie: “I did not have sex with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.” Sadly, a cowardly United States Senate refused to convict him of the crimes of which he was guilty (they never intended to from the start). Henry Hyde was told by Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska: “Henry, I don’t care if you prove he [Clinton] raped a woman and then stood up and shot her dead—you are not going to get sixty-seven votes [for conviction and removal from office]” (Schipper 23). Many senators ignored the evidence and only went through the motions of a trial, eagerly waiting to “justify the wicked” (Pro. 17:15). Nevertheless, the refusal to confess the facts of the matter put the nation through a great deal of turmoil that could have been avoided. Some churches might have likewise been spared heartaches if an elder, preacher, deacon, or member had been willing to confess his faults and repent.

19. James adds after the above exhortation: “And pray one for another” (Jam. 5:16). Paul frequently mentioned praying for brethren (Eph. 3:14-19; Phi. 1:9-11). He also asked brethren to pray for each other—and him as well (Eph. 6:18-20). Intercessory prayer is obviously of great value. Christians ought to remember in their prayers those who have confessed their sins and are in need of spiritual strength. We may

also pray for the spiritual well-being and enrichment of all, those who have fallen away, the faithful proclamation of the Word on the part of those who are teaching and preaching, those who have recently experienced grief, and those who have difficult decisions to make. We will probably never know this side of eternity how much good has been accomplished through our efforts.

20. Church members are to use whatever talents and abilities they have to "minister the same one to another" (1 Pet. 4:10). Many brethren have profited each other in physical ways. Some excel in their abilities to build or repair; others have mechanical or medical knowledge. Shared information can be quite useful, but the context of this passage indicates spiritual abilities. Possessing the finest talents in the church will avail nothing, however, if we do not use them for each other's benefits. How many would have been left in darkness and misery if Jesus had kept to Himself His knack for teaching and His power to heal? How many Christians would have become backsliders without Paul's verbal and written exhortations to remain faithful? How many were discouraged because Demas folded his tent and went home? Paul put the needs of brethren first: "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 The. 2:8). We likewise need to unselfishly minister to one another.

21. The previous twenty admonitions were all of a positive nature—things we **ought** to do for one another. These final ten dwell on things we **ought not** to do to ourselves. Most of these seem rather obvious, but every one of these sins has been committed against brethren. "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned" (Jam. 5:9). In the noun form this Greek word is translated "groaning" (Acts 7:34; Rom. 8:26); as a verb it is translated "sighed" (Mark 7:34), "groan" (2 Cor. 5:2, 4), "with grief" (Heb 13:17), and "grudge" ("grumble," NKJ). Why must we abstain from this kind of mutual treatment? One reason is that it is counter-productive in encouraging and comforting each other; the second reason is supplied by James: "Behold, the judge standeth before the door" (Jam. 5:9). Groaning against a brother is also probably going to lead to some of the other actions prohibited below. The time to stop the harm from escalating is in the complaining stage.

22. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more" (Rom. 14:13). Obviously, this admonition does not include areas of life in

which we are violating the Word of God; in such cases we have a responsibility to speak. The context of Romans 14 reveals that we are not to judge each other in matters of judgment. One eats meat (formerly forbidden under the Law of Moses), but another finds the practice repulsive. If a practice is authorized by God (and the eating of all meats was, after the Law was nailed to the cross—Acts 10:9-16), then our attitudes become preferences, not law. One person might say, “I could never do that,” which is fine; no one is required to eat those meats. The problem begins with a person thinking, “Since I cannot do it; nobody should do it. It is wrong to do it.” No one has the right to bind a preference—or to think less of a brother who chooses to exercise his freedom in Christ. We must stand firm on the teachings of Christ and refuse to judge in matters of option.

23. Another danger to watch out for is becoming “puffed up for one against another” (1 Cor. 4:6), which is the opposite of being kindly affectioned and submitting to one another. The Corinthians were evidently playing a game of “I am better than you,” or “My spiritual teacher is better than your spiritual teacher.” Paul is the only one who uses this Greek word in its verb form (six times in 1 Corinthians and once in Colossians), and it is from a word that means “a pair of bellows” (Vincent 3:205), thus conveying the *puffed up* image. The Corinthians also bragged about how much knowledge they had (1 Cor. 8:1) and how fluent they were in their foreign tongues (1 Cor. 12), as though Christians are to be in competition with each other. We are not each other’s adversaries; we are each other’s helpers. Our adversary is the devil (1 Pet. 5:8); Christians are on the same side. Our overriding goal should be to help each other arrive intact to our heavenly destination. We ought to rejoice in every other child of God’s spiritual successes. Jealousy, pride, and wondering if we will get the credit we are due have no place in the life of a Christian. We really have no basis for being puffed up anyway; as Paul reminded these immature brethren: “And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?” (1 Cor. 4:7). God is the one who deserves glory and praise—not us.

24. “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). Since Christians have been born again and are a new creation, we must jettison old habits and patterns of living, and for most Americans that includes lying. In 1991 a book by James Patterson and Peter Kim was published; the title of it was *The*

Day America Told the Truth. Among other interesting items, their research revealed that "ninety-one percent of us lie regularly"; these are not spur-of-the-moment inventions but "conscious, premeditated lies." The authors concluded: "Lying has become a cultural trait in America. Lying is embedded in our national character" (Crismier 85). Those who become Christians will need to abandon this practice. God disapproves of it so strongly that He did not tolerate it when Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the church (Acts 5:1-11). Lies have been responsible for much evil in the world. Among the list of things that God hates from Proverbs 6 are "a lying tongue" (Pro. 6:17) and a "false witness that speaketh lies" (6:19). This action is so repugnant to God that He has decreed that all liars shall have their place in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8). Surely, Christians will not want to lie to one another.

25. Perhaps related to the two previous commands is this one set forth by James: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren" (4:11). It is bad enough to judge a fellow Christian's motives; it is even worse to begin spreading around one's suspicions. If anyone has a legitimate grievance with a brother, Jesus provided a means of resolution (Mat. 18:15-17). No one needs to know the charges unless the person in question refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoing. Nothing needs to be spread around the congregation (or the brotherhood) until it is established that a legitimate problem exists. Again, we ought to treat others as we would want to be treated (Mat. 7:12).

26. Paul admonished the Galatians not to provoke or envy one another (Gal. 5:26). While we are enjoined to "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24), we do not want to provoke one another in a negative way. The word used in Galatians means "to call forth to challenge to combat" (Robertson 314). What strange behavior to exercise against our fellow pilgrims! How we need to remember that the enemy is the devil, not ourselves! Again, the source of the discord may be rooted in envy. The problem in Galatia may have arisen from the Judaizing teachers who were insisting that the Law of Moses still be observed. Had two parties formed, both of whom were attempting to outdo the other? Paul did mention later that some preached Christ from the wrong motives (Phi. 1:16-17). Differences in doctrine must be resolved; we have an obligation to "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Brethren must be united in our Gospel efforts—not rivals.

27. In the same passage in Galatians Paul warns the brethren not to “bite and devour one another,” lest they be “consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Vincent says of the terms used here that they are “strong expressions of partisan hatred exerting itself for mutual injury” (4:163). This picture is a savage one; the combatants seem to be fighting to the death, with the destruction of each other being their steadfast commitment. Probably, Paul is using these terms to show the viciousness of brethren who go after each other relentlessly with a view toward cutting, tearing, and destroying each other’s souls. How ironic that such verbal dogfights often break out only moments after singing, “Angry words, O let them never from the tongue unbridled slip,” or “Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” How hard is it to see that something is wrong with such behavior? No wonder Solomon wrote, “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue” (Pro. 18:21). How many brethren have left the church (and ultimately lost their souls) because of the “deadly poison” in a brother’s tongue (Jam. 3:8)? Let us rather speak words of encouragement and edification.

28. Some have carried their grudges beyond the family of God. Paul asks, “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?” (1 Cor. 6:1). He charges that brethren ought to have enough wisdom to settle their own problems (6:5) and that, if necessary, we allow ourselves to be defrauded (6:7). Some would say, “What? Do you know how much money being silent is going to cost me?” We might ask in return: “How much is it going to cost the church when the community discovers that the adherents of this new religion cannot even get along with each other?” Besides, it may not be a coincidence that Paul includes as causes for withdrawing fellowship from a brother the sins of thievery, covetousness, and extortion (6:10). Some who call themselves brethren may get away with stealing from members of the church, but they will never inherit the kingdom of God. They have all the reward they will ever get. Faithful brethren should not let outsiders despise the church.

29. “Do not sow discord one against another.” Although there is not a verse that says these specific words, the very idea of sowing discord implies an intent to divide brother against brother. In the Old Testament God calls the one who sows discord among brethren an abomination (Pro. 6:19). The New Testament’s doctrine concerning this subject is no less sobering: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are”

(1 Cor. 3:17). Truly, such discord results from carnal-minded brethren, who envy, create strife, and cause divisions (3:3). James told brethren not to glory if they had “bitter envying and strife” in their hearts (Jam. 3:14). Strife’s motives are usually envy and arrogance. How else can Diotrephes be explained? How would anyone dare to refuse to receive an inspired apostle who knew Jesus personally, to speak against him with malicious words, and to go so far as to cast some brethren out of the church (3 John 9-10)? Some so-called Christians possess no real love of God, respect for Christ or His church, or the Word inspired of the Holy Spirit; they think the church belongs to them and that it is theirs to do with as they will, like a child who has been given a new toy. Sowers of discord, who defile the temple of God with their ungodly antics, shall be destroyed by God (as shown above). It would be better in the judgment for them to have been an ignorant savage who never knew the Truth than to despise the spiritual blessings available to them so that they could usurp and exercise authority over others (cf., 2 Pet. 2:21).

30. Another practice of non-Christians (in addition to that of lying, as seen above) is “hating one another” (Tit. 3:3). Surely, no child of God could be guilty of such a thing. Diotrephes must have been. John was aware of the overt animosity that some *brethren* possessed: “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). This attitude goes far beyond “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23); this individual has no desire to save the soul of the one he despises, which demonstrates his utter hatred of a brother in Christ and contempt for Jesus, who died for all—even while they were sinners (Rom. 5:8). We all must fight against sin—the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life—as well as false doctrine. We must, however, beware of transferring a member’s conduct to that individual personally. What he does is different from who he is. We cannot afford to hate one another.

CONCLUSION

If these thirty scriptural considerations have not convinced us that we are our brother’s keeper, one wonders what it would take. The Word of God is thorough regarding the relationship church members are to have with one another. How we should treat each other and how we should not treat each other are spelled out in such a way as to be unmistakable. Although these requirements are given to us as members of

the body of Christ, they do not serve as a license to ignore all who are not Christians. Paul claimed that he was a debtor to all men (Rom. 1:14) and declared that he would by all means available to him (lawful, that is) save some (1 Cor. 9:22).

In 1966 the record album, *Sounds of Silence*, by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, became so popular that it remained on the Top Forty album chart for 33 weeks (Whitburn 240). One song, written by Paul Simon, from that album expresses an attitude that all too many people have towards others, but it should not characterize those who truly are their brothers' keepers (in Adam, as well as in Christ).

“A Most Peculiar Man”

He was a most peculiar man.
That's what Mrs. Reardon says,
And she should know;
She lived upstairs from him.
She said he was a most peculiar man.

He was a most peculiar man.
He lived all alone, within a house,
Within a room, within himself.
A most peculiar man.

He had no friends; He seldom spoke.
And no one in turn ever spoke to him
'Cause he wasn't friendly, and he didn't care,
And he wasn't like them.
Oh, no, he was a most peculiar man.

He died last Saturday.
He turned on the gas, and he went to sleep,
With the windows closed, so he'd never wake up
To his silent world and his tiny room,
And Mrs. Reardon says he has a brother somewhere
Who should be notified soon.

And all the people said,
“What a shame that he's dead!
But wasn't he a most peculiar man?”

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“WHAT HAST THOU DONE?”

GENESIS 4:10

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October, 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on *Marriage and The Christian Home* (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for

the past 21 years, which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

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THE QUESTION ASKED

In Genesis 4:10 the Scriptures record the following: “And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

The history of man needs to be studied more than it is. Some try to discount the Old Testament in a general sense. Some members of the church sometimes say, “I really don’t like to study the Old Bible.” What in the world do they mean by this? They are probably saying that, since we are living under the New Covenant, we are wasting our time with the study of the Old Testament. This writer could not disagree with that mindset more. Paul said, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

I have taught a little class of boys and girls on Sunday evenings for as long as I can remember before our worship begins. My class is called Faithful Bible Investigators. It is for those who are big enough to sit up and take nourishment up to about the fifth grade. Among other things I teach them the story of the Bible. Instructions are given that indicate that the Bible is **one** book. It is separated into two different parts but is still one Book. Further they are taught that the One Book has 66

chapters in it that are sometimes called books, with Genesis being a chapter as well as Acts being a chapter. They are shown how that each book of the Bible has a direct bearing and sustains a relationship with the books before it and those that follow that particular book, with Genesis being a partial exception. There are no books preceding Genesis so nothing bears a direct relationship to it before the beginning. They are taught how that Exodus depends upon Genesis that is before it and Leviticus that follows it. This runs all the way through the rest of the Bible.

One may question the judgment of such teaching and that is fine. This scribe has learned over the years that we isolate the books and many times come away without the better understanding of a particular passage.

PRECEDING EVENTS

God made man and woman on the sixth day of creation. On the seventh day God rested. God and man had a special fellowship that was enjoyed by both. God is a sociable Being (using that phrase in an accommodative sense). When Adam had named all the creatures that God had made, there was nothing there even near Adam's equal. There was no one for him to fellowship with on his own level. God caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, took a rib from his side, and made woman. Again, this all occurred on the sixth day. Man now has an equal, and God is pleased with all that He has done and called it "very good." God is thus sociable in that he saw this need for man to have a social being such as himself to be with—an helpmeet. She was called Eve.

An obvious lesson is involved for the worldly, sensual-minded of our day. God never intended man and the animal world to have any kind of sexual or equal relationship together. In fact, He outright forbade it. Man and woman had a wonderful relationship together. It was one that God intended, designed, and put into motion. He said, "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). The home is thus begun, and the basis for its existence is set in the Scriptures.

God and man had a wonderful fellowship that both enjoyed very much. Some question this notion, thinking that God needed no one to fellowship. That is true in one sense, for God needs nothing—everything is His. If He needed it, He could make it—if it did not betray His

character. However, Adam is called the son of God in Luke 3:38: “Which was *the son* of Enos, which was *the son* of Seth, which was *the son* of Adam, which was *the son* of God.” Why would God not want to have fellowship with man whom He had created and enjoy that fellowship? Are we to assume that, when the Voice of God comes walking in the midst of the Garden of Eden when man had sinned, this was the only time that God walked in that Garden? Isaiah said:

Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

This passage implies that God has wonderful fellowship with man when man is not given over to sin. At one point in man’s life, God had a fellowship with man that we likely do not really understand nor appreciate. Some have the notion that man has a better and sweeter fellowship with God today through Christ than Adam had in the remote beginning. This writer does not believe that argument can be sustained in light of all the Scriptures. There is absolutely no reason to assume that God has today a better fellowship with us than He had with Adam and Eve.

When man sinned, both God and man lost something. God lost the fellowship that He had with man, and man lost the fellowship that he had with God. We **must** understand that both lost in this matter. Did God have to restore that fellowship? No! Who made us? God! It is very obvious that God in His eternal Being enjoyed the fellowship that He had with man and thus went about to be back in fellowship with man. In a Gospel sermon at the Memphis School of Preaching during the late 1960s the late and lamented brother Franklin Camp said: “When man sinned, God started running toward Pentecost.” This author had never heard that expression before and hopes and prays to God that his mind stays sound and that he can remember that beautiful expression from the heart and mind of this close personal friend and Bible giant in understanding. After that sermon we went, as our custom was, out to a cafeteria for lunch. After mentioning this phrase to him: he expounded upon it. That is when this writer began the study of fellowship between God and man and how serious it really is. Many congregations and preachers think lightly of this subject today. They fail to see how that sin un-repent of separates one from God and how those who fail to walk in the truth are to have fellowship withdrawn (cf., 1 Cor. 5:11; Rom. 16:17; 2 The. 3:6). Where did we ever get the notion that we can

do what God cannot do? He cannot and does not have any fellowship with one who is not willing to repent and obey; though He wills that they do, He will not and does not fellowship them in their sin. However, some have the notion that we can fellowship—bid Godspeed to—those who are in error.

Fellowship is like a log chain. When a link is broken, it needs repairing, or it is of no use. God desires fellowship with man. He wills it, but only on His terms. Erring brethren who have been withdrawn from cannot be in fellowship with God and faithful people. Those who accept them into their fellowship are attempting to do something that God cannot do. That *chain* has to be repaired. It is in a broken state until the erring repents. It is not repaired when some congregation makes the decision that they can do what God cannot. This doctrine is in serious need of repair among us today.

CAIN

Abel and Cain were both commanded to offer a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice came about in the world due to sin. Both Abel and Cain were instructed what to offer. The Hebrews writer says that Abel offered his by faith. Cain did not offer his sacrifice by faith. Cain decided that he could add to or take away from what God had commanded. Does that sound remotely familiar to us today? Brethren all over think they can add to or take away from that which God has commanded in His eternal Word. Cain had the same opportunity to do what God said, as did Abel. He made the choice. It was not God's design or plan that this happen the way it did. God desires all men to obey. Yet from the time sin entered into the Garden of Eden, truth and error have existed side by side, and they will continue to do so for as long as the earth remains. The temptation of Cain was common to all men. Paul said:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it* (1 Cor. 10:13).

The tempting of Cain was the devil's work. Yes, Cain made the choice! Flip Wilson, the comedian, used to say, “The devil made me do it.” This is not completely true. The devil did not make Cain do it, but he did place the temptation before him.

GENESIS 4 IN GENERAL

The theme of this chapter is the progress of sin. It also sets forth the idea of faith in the blood. In chapter 1 we have an introduction to God. In chapter 2 man's place in the world (his responsibility, his fellowship with God, others, and his relationship to society) is under consideration. In chapter 3 we have the entrance of sin and the separation from God. It is important to keep in mind that the Bible was not intended as a detailed discussion of the history of man but to set forth those principles of redemption. The seed of woman would be stronger than Satan. The struggle is set forth between righteousness and evil. Cain and Abel symbolized this struggle. It is indicated by the time we read Genesis 4 that Adam and Eve had already had other children. We know not how many or at what time, but Cain and Abel represent the struggle between right and wrong.

We need to understand some of the principles behind sacrifice. The first time we read of it is in Genesis 4. Faith and worship are herein set forth. Faith rests upon testimony. The faith of Abel rested in the fact that they were told the kind of sacrifice to offer. We are not told here that God had made a revelation to them, but such is implied. At the time that sin came into the world, faith was at stake. This chapter shows the necessity of faith to please God. Sacrifice was the beginning of this process, and that sacrifice was offered by faith. It is this author's judgment that God's clothing Adam and Eve with skins of animals was the beginning of sacrifice. This writer does not believe that sacrifice had its origin with man and his wisdom. He needed some way to approach God. God demonstrated through their clothing that animals had to make a sacrifice for them to be clothed.

Sacrifice within itself is insufficient. Two things are needed. First, there is the **person that is offering the sacrifice**. Abel in offering his sacrifice shows that he was sinful and that he needed forgiveness from God. Cain did not have such a realization, and we see the results. A remedial system was set in motion. In chapter 2 Adam and Eve had a wonderful relationship with God as regards fellowship. It was a *face-to-face* relationship with God. We probably do not appreciate how sweet this fellowship was. Adam had authority until he sinned, which should make us appreciate more Jesus' statement: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat. 28:18). The basis of this authority was His complete loyalty and devotion to God. God is saying that His

dominion is now through Christ. What God is saying to Christ is what Adam and Eve had in the beginning.

In this remedial system that God set up there are three things that are involved: (1) sacrifice, (2) the altar, and (3) the priest. These are fundamental things that we will find through the rest of the Bible in man's approach to God. The first sacrifice that man made was by Abel. We must understand that God's arrangement is that an entirely innocent animal must lose his life for another to make a sacrifice. The rest of the Bible will bear this out. The lamb was the firstling of the flock—the best that he had—for God will not approve one's second best. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

The second thing needed was the **altar**. Not just anyone could offer a sacrifice. Only a priest could, and we will cover that in the study of the Scriptures. Sin moved from the individual to the family. Here we have the record of the first motherhood. The first birth, the first family, the first murder, and the first martyr are here mentioned. Therefore, this is a series of firsts. All of these are found in the fourth chapter of Genesis.

We have a description of Abel and Cain's work. One was a keeper of sheep while the other a tiller of the soil. They not only worked, but they worshiped. One of the things that we need to learn in this first account of worship is what worship means. Worship is giving. Some are prone to think of it as *getting* instead of *giving*. They will say that they get nothing out of the worship. That may be so, but the reason is that they misunderstand the purpose of worship. When we worship, we are giving. Consider our worship in song. Did we sing or did we just sit there? Did we *give* or were we there to *get*? Unless we give, we will never get anything out of the process of worship. This is vital and fundamental in our worship today. Each one of us must give our mind, heart, soul, and our all in worship, if it is to have meaning to us.

There are some things about Abel's sacrifice that we need to remember: (1) Abel teaches us that God is to be worshiped—not because God commands it but because of the very nature of the Creator and the creature. The majesty and the holiness of God and the frailty of man are here seen. The worshiper must come to worship because he desires to worship God. (2) Abel teaches that God is to be worshiped through sacrifice. One cannot worship God acceptably without

sacrifice. (3) God is to be worshiped through appointed sacrifice. Cain brought a sacrifice, but it was not of blood. It takes blood for the appointed sacrifice, not vegetables or corn. He ignored God by offering the wrong thing. No matter how much he offered it would have never been acceptable to God. (4) It must be in faith. These are the elements that are *musts* in all acceptable worship. Cain is an example of human wisdom as opposed to divine revelation. There is human willfulness compared to what God had commanded. Cain attempted to worship by his own standards and not by God's. There is human pride versus human humility. Abel had humility (though not stated) but it is inferred. After God accepted Abel's sacrifice, there is the development of hatred versus love (the two go side by side). Cain was also cast out by God. There is a loneliness of being cast out, thus missing divine fellowship.

In Cain and Abel we have the tragedy of sin. God will not accept worship with force. We cannot force Him to do anything. Abel recognized this principle while Cain failed. Abel knew that people had to be holy. Abel knew that holy people are joyous people. In Adam and Eve we have a glimpse of the results of sin, but in Cain we see the blight of sin and how it was un-get-overable to him and was more than he could bear (as brother N. B. Hardeman would occasionally say). The penalty and the consequences of his sin are upon us all. The grace and mercy of God will save us if we will obey His truths. These remedial things introduced by God were intended to help man avoid the selfishness of sin.

Genesis 4 teaches us that the one that rejects the influence of God leaves himself to become an influence of evil wherever he goes. The first account of envy we have in the Bible is between two brothers, and it is inhuman. Envy will override even the natural tie that ties families together. The bonds of love can be broken through envy. Envy is blind to every good trait and sets the heart against the holiest and loftiest power. Envy leads to hatred. Abel did nothing to promote this kind of hatred in Cain. We also learn that it is dangerous to dislike anyone. Hatred and envy leads to violence.

In Abel we learn that right may always expect to suffer in the hand of those that are evil. We cannot live right without suffering (2 Tim. 3:12). This is likely what has led us to compromise in our worship. We want to get along with everyone instead of standing for right. The first murderer was a wicked man, and the first martyr was a saint. That has

continued down through time. God is always opposed by evil. Every attempt to compromise with evil is at the expense of right.

We learn also that it is better to have a righteous death than an unrighteous life. Would we not all rather be dead like Abel than be like Cain and be as a vagabond all over the world? To live without God is worse than death itself.

We learn that we cannot injure another without God noticing. We learn that we are our brother's keepers. This writer has observed that many want to be released from all responsibility to their neighbors, but they do not want them to have their responsibility to them released.

God presents for our consideration several comparisons in Genesis 4. There are two seeds—Cain's and Abel's, and two worshipers and methods of worship: humanistic and according to divine revelation. Likewise we have two seed lines: Cain and Seth, along with two kinds of lives: earthly and spiritual. Cain and his family represent an earthly, sensual life, while Seth and his family symbolize those who recognize their need of God and worship Him. There are also two kinds of homes. Cain's home is worldly, earthly, and devoted to those things that are vile; Seth's home is religious with faith and service to God. God also presents two kinds of security. Cain and his family looked for security in earthly things. Cain built a city, which is the first record of such in the Bible; it becomes important as we study man and his relationship to God. He tried to build without God for his own protection. In Seth you have the kind of security that is in God. "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26).

There are two kinds of effects on people that follow the line of Cain and Seth. Cain went out from the presence of God. This means where God's presence was manifest and where men met to worship God. Notice 2 Kings 13:23 for a commentary in this matter:

And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

This denotes a people that were in covenant relationship with God and therefore worshiped God in harmony with the covenant that He made going back to Abraham. Cain goes out from the presence of God into a world where he would not find God. He went to the land of Nod, which means, "wandering or vagabond." This is a life without purpose

or meaning. This is what happens without the worship of God. This is characteristic of humanistic worship.

We now have set before us the history and the background of Genesis 4:10. This author set forth this study to set these things before us so we might make the proper applications in our own lives. Let us study to make the proper application.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“HOW THEN CAN I DO THIS GREAT WICKEDNESS, AND SIN AGAINST GOD?” GENESIS 39:9

B. J. Clarke



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INTRODUCTION

Thousands of questions populate the pages of Holy Scripture, and the amazing thing about these questions is that they are perpetually relevant. Essentially, mankind has the very same questions today as in the past. For instance, Job's question: "If a man die, shall he live *again*?" (Job 14:14), is still being asked today. Questions regarding our origin, our purpose, and our destiny have always been on the minds of the human race.

On the other hand, there are questions in the Bible that modern man ought to be asking more frequently. Our assigned question, which fell from the lips of Joseph, falls into that category. Let us ask several questions about this question.

WHY DID JOSEPH ASK THIS QUESTION?

After Joseph's brothers sold him into the hands of the Ishmaelites, one of Pharaoh's officers, Potiphar, bought him to be his servant. It did not take long for Potiphar to observe that the Lord was with Joseph (cf., Acts 7:9), "and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen. 39:3). Consequently, "Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all *that* he had he put into his hand" (39:4). Potiphar was pleased to see that everything Joseph touched seemed to turn to gold. Immediately after placing Joseph in charge of his affairs, Potiphar began to reap the peripheral blessings of God's favor toward Joseph—"the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field" (39:5).

So confident was Potiphar in Joseph that "he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat" (39:6). He had no reason to doubt Joseph's integrity, and thus he put his affairs into Joseph's hands and trusted that he would do him right. Potiphar accepted Joseph, trusted Joseph, and promoted Joseph.

However, Potiphar's wife entered the picture. She had not failed to notice that "Joseph was *a* goodly *person*, and well favoured" (39:6). Joseph took after his mother Rachel, who was "beautiful and well favored" (29:17). Accordingly, Potiphar's wife was physically attracted to him and she "cast her eyes upon Joseph" (39:7). It started with a look of admiration, which led to a look of lust, which led to a verbal proposition. She said, "Lie with me" (39:7). Joseph refused her initial advance and explained his reason for so doing. He said:

Behold, my master wotteth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; *There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (39:8-9).

WHAT DOES THIS QUESTION REVEAL ABOUT JOSEPH?

Joseph's reply to Potiphar's wife speaks volumes about who Joseph was and how he lived. The question reveals unto us what kind of heart Joseph had. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Mat. 12:35). What we say reveals the things that we think. Joseph's question is a window into his heart. Joseph thought upon things that were honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (cf., Phi.

4:8). He was not at all enticed by the thinking of Potiphar’s wife for two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3), and their thinking about morals most certainly did not agree.

It is very crucial to observe that in his reply Joseph focused upon himself and his own accountability to God. He could have justifiably rebuked Potiphar’s wife for even making such a suggestion. However, he concentrated upon his own responsibility and used that as the basis for his decision. He appealed to the trust Potiphar had placed in him by making him the steward over all that he owned. Potiphar had held nothing back from Joseph except for one thing—his wife. To avoid fornication every man is to “have **his own** wife” (1 Cor. 7:2). This was perfectly understandable to Joseph. He was not about to betray the trust of the one who had believed in him so much. For all of the pleasure he might have had in committing adultery with his master’s wife, Joseph understood that such pleasure would only be temporary—the consequences would be permanent. By acquiescing to her proposition Joseph would have forfeited the relationship of trust he had cultivated with Potiphar. Joseph practiced the golden rule long before it was ever articulated by our Lord (Mat. 7:12). He did unto Potiphar as he would have Potiphar do unto him. He loved his neighbor as he loved himself, and thus he respected the rights of his neighbor (Lev. 19:18; Mat. 22:39). Therefore, Joseph refused to sin against Potiphar.

More importantly, Joseph loved God and believed in living by God’s standard. Joseph did not believe in the “if it feels good, do it” philosophy adhered to by so many today. He did not believe in situation ethics. He did not embrace the view that there is no such thing as absolute right or wrong. He did not do that which was right in his own eyes (Jud. 17:6; 21:25; Pro. 12:15). He did not believe that man is the measure of all things and that the way of man is in himself. He understood that “*it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). He did not trust his own heart as the compass to guide him in making moral decisions (Pro. 3:5-6; 28:26). Joseph **did** believe in such a thing as *wickedness*, and he further believed that God is the one Who defines what wickedness is. Based upon the revelation of God, Joseph knew that to commit adultery would constitute “great wickedness” and a “sin against God” (Gen. 39:9). Dean Alford, as quoted by Joseph Exell, wisely observed:

Sin is a word of which the world knows not the meaning. Men must know what God is, or they cannot know what sin is. When Joseph spoke of sinning against God, he used this term of a positive and definite God, who had manifested Himself, and with whom he was in covenant. To sin against Him, to break His positive command, was to reject and despise his covenant God; to tread under foot His promises and His mercies (390).

Joseph used the commandments of God regarding sexual purity as a lamp unto his feet and as a light unto his path (Psa. 119:105). Long before the wisdom of Proverbs was ever recorded by inspiration, Joseph demonstrated wisdom in his moral decisions. He used the light of God's truth to keep him "from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman" (Pro. 6:23-24). He refused to lust after Potiphar's wife in his heart, and he did not let her take him with her eyelids or her seductive talk (6:25). He knew that one weak moment of compromise with an immoral woman could lead to disastrous consequences (6:26). He knew that saying yes to Potiphar's wife would be like taking fire into his bosom (6:27). He refused to burn with passion because he loved God, loved Potiphar, and had no desire to get burned with the consequences so often associated with adultery (6:28). He understood that "whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he *that* doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (6:32).

Regrettably, Potiphar's wife would not take "No" for an answer. The Record says that "she spake to Joseph day by day" (Gen. 39:10). Nevertheless, Joseph's initial resolve did not weaken or waver. He came no closer to saying "Yes" in the days that followed her initial proposition. He said what he meant the first time, and meant what he said! Her persistence did not pay off. "He hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, *or* to be with her" (39:10). Joseph rejected her advances, and kept on about the business of serving his master. As much as possible, Joseph was determined not to enter into the path of the wicked. He would "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Pro. 4:15).

Then it happened. Potiphar's wife waited for Joseph to come into the house to take care of the household business. "*There was none of the men of the house there within*" (Gen. 39:11). She put her hands on Joseph's garment and propositioned him again, saying, "Lie with me." The actions of Potiphar's wife are virtually a perfect match with the description of the immoral woman in the book of Proverbs. She

"flattereth with her words" (Pro. 2:16; 7:5). "She *is* loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now *is she* without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner" (7:11-12).

Before examining Joseph's response, we should be reminded of the circumstances under which this temptation came to him:

It came on Joseph when he was dwelling among a nation of idolaters, away from the restraints of home and the influence of his father and grandfather, by which he had been accustomed to be regulated. If, therefore, his piety had been a mere conventional thing, he would certainly have yielded, as many others in like circumstances have done. Which of us has not known cases of youths who at home were reputable and well behaved, but who, when they have gone to another city or another land, where they were entirely unknown to those by whom they were surrounded, have run riot in iniquity, and excused themselves by quoting the debasing proverb that "when we are in Rome we must do as they do at Rome"? But Joseph was not a youth of that sort. His piety was not a matter of longitude and latitude. He believed in God, and sought to serve Him in all places and in all cases; and he did in Egypt precisely as he would have done, in like circumstances, in Canaan (William M. Taylor quoted by Exell 391).

Accordingly, Joseph "left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out" (Gen. 39:12). She may have stripped him of his coat, but she did not strip him of his character. Where did Joseph receive this character? It did not just drop out of the sky into his heart and mind. Joseph's convictions were the result of good teaching at the hand of his parents Jacob and Rachel. Thanks to their strong moral convictions, Joseph was well prepared for someone like Potiphar's wife.

We have all heard of the fury that a scorned woman can bring forth, and Potiphar's wife wasted no time seeking revenge against Joseph. As far as she was concerned, Joseph had rejected her for the last time. Now he would have to pay. Calling the men of the house to her side, she lied, telling them that Joseph had tried to rape her. When she screamed so loudly, Joseph fled in panic, leaving his garment behind. At least, that is the story she told. When Potiphar arrived home, she told him the same lie and "his wrath was kindled" (Gen. 39:19; cf., Pro. 6:33-35). Her story seemed so believable, especially with Joseph's clothing in her possession as visual evidence. "Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison" (Gen. 39:20). A man with lesser faith might have thought to himself: "I should have just accepted her proposition. At least that way I would have had some pleasure prior to my pain."

However, Joseph's greatest pleasure was serving God. Like Moses, Joseph chose to suffer affliction rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (cf., Heb. 11:25).

Some would look at the aftermath of Joseph's question as evidence that it does no good to serve God. Why bother being righteous if God is going to allow such harm to come your way? Asaph struggled with this very kind of thinking (Psa. 73:1-14) until he finally figured out what Joseph already believed—the reward awaiting the righteous is worth any earthly pain that one might endure (Psa. 73:17-28; Rom. 8:18; Heb. 11:26-27). Joseph kept clinging in faith to God even when his situation was dark and bleak. His faith was rewarded, for even after he was imprisoned, “the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen. 39:21). Consequently, it was not long until the keeper of the prison

committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that *were* in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer *of it*. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing *that was* under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and *that* which he did, the LORD made *it* to prosper (39:22-23).

Eventually, God's providence put Joseph second in command only to Pharaoh (41:39-46). It does pay to serve God, both here and hereafter.

WHAT IF JUDAH HAD ASKED THE SAME QUESTION?

It is interesting to note that in the chapter immediately preceding Joseph fleeing from fornication, we find his older brother Judah seeking fornication. Judah arranged for one of his sons, Er, to marry a woman named Tamar. However, because Er was so wicked, “the LORD slew him” (Gen. 38:7). Judah ordered his son Onan to help his brother's wife conceive a son, but when Onan devised his own method of birth control, the Lord “slew him also” (38:10). Judah then ordered Tamar to remain a widow until his son Shelah was old enough to marry her. However, Judah was so afraid that Shelah might die also that he failed to give him unto Tamar after Shelah was grown. Tamar decided to take matters into her own hands and so she cast off her widow's garments, dressed in the attire of a harlot, and waited in ambush for Judah to pass by her way. “When Judah saw her, he thought her *to be* an harlot; because she had covered her face. And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she *was* his daughter in law)” (38:15-16). After settling on a price,

and some collateral, Judah "came in unto her, and she conceived by him" (38:18).

About three months after this sinful tryst, Tamar began to show forth her pregnancy. Judah was told, and he said, "Bring her forth, and let her be burnt" (38:24). However, Judah was in for a shocking surprise! Tamar "sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these *are*, *am* I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose *are* these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff" (38:25). Judah was at least honest enough to own up to his sin, and to admit: "She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son" (38:26).

If only Judah's nobility had manifested itself earlier! If only he had possessed the same integrity as his brother Joseph! If only he had asked the same question that Joseph asked! The fact that he did not is proof positive that his respect for God was secondary to his desire for personal pleasure. Judah's will came first; God's will came second! He was not the self-denying man of integrity that Joseph would prove to be.

WHAT IF DAVID HAD ASKED THE SAME QUESTION?

It is tragic, but true, that David is as notorious for seeking adultery as Joseph is famous for rejecting it. We are painfully familiar with how David arose from his bed one evening "and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman *was* very beautiful to look upon" (2 Sam. 11:2). It would be wonderful if the next sentence in Scripture read as follows: "But David remembered the Lord his God, and all of His kindness toward David, and David said within himself, How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Instead, "David sent and enquired after the woman.... And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her" (11:3-4).

Joseph rejected the aggression of Potiphar's wife; David became the aggressor and pursued another man's wife. Joseph stood for what was right even when his life was difficult; David lived in riches and a palace, and compromised. Joseph ended up in the palace; and David spent a good portion of his life on the run away from the palace. Even when he was at home, the problems of his dysfunctional family never left him (12:7-12).

While we admire the humility and penitent attitude of David regarding his sin (2 Sam. 12:13; Psa. 32; 51), we cannot help but wish

that he had asked the same question Joseph asked. How would his life have been different if he had loved God more than his own pleasure? Joseph gave us an everlasting example of moral purity; David gave us a permanent illustration of the pain and suffering that comes from loving ourselves more than we love God.

HOW CAN WE BE PREPARED TO ASK SUCH A QUESTION?

Joseph did not wait until temptation time to think about how he would answer it. Thanks to his parents, and his own desire to know God, Joseph had been preparing himself all of his life for such a time as this. When the storm comes, it is too late to try and build a storm shelter! We must prepare in advance for the various storms of life which will come our way (Mat. 7:24-27). An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. How can we develop our faith to the point that we will ask the same question Joseph asked when we are faced with temptation? God has provided us with the necessary resources to be able to resist temptation. We just have to be willing to take the way of escape He has provided. If we will do four important things, we will be able to ask the same question Joseph asked. We must:

Let God Say Something to Us Every Day

This author is not suggesting in this statement that God speaks to us in any miraculous fashion or by some still, small voice in the night. Nor is he suggesting that God speaks to us by putting some feeling into our heart. However, God does speak to us in these last days by His Son (Heb. 1:1-2), and His Son speaks to us through the words which He has spoken which will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). These words are recorded for us on the pages of Holy Scripture. In fact, these words encompass more than just the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The epistles are also the words of Christ because the Holy Spirit received the message He gave to the inspired writers from Christ (John 16:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:13-16; 14:37).

Therefore, a persistent study of the written Word of God is one of the greatest means by which we can remain faithful as Christians. The apostle Paul knew that knowledge of God's will has a tremendous capacity for strengthening our faith. No doubt, this is the reason that he told the Colossians:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness (Col. 1:9-11).

The Psalmist declared, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). In fact, virtually the entirety of Psalm 119 extols the strengthening virtue of God’s Holy Word. The following is just a small sampling of the 176 verses therein:

I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! *yea, sweeter* than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.... Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things* to *be* right; *and* I hate every false way. Thy testimonies *are* wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments (Psa. 119:101-105, 128-131).

Furthermore, the manner in which our Lord remained faithful during the onslaught of the tempter is particularly instructive to those who desire to remain faithful to Christ. Each time Satan hurled a temptation at Jesus, our Lord responded by quoting Scripture (Mat. 4:1-11). He had hidden the Word in His heart that He might not sin. His persistent reference to the Word of God sent the devil packing. Likewise, if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (Jam. 4:7), and one of the best ways to resist him is to let God say something to us every day through the vehicle of His written Word. Show me a man whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates therein both day and night, and I will show you a man who “walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa. 1:1-2).

Many excuse themselves from their neglect of Bible study by saying that they are just too busy to find time to delve into the Word every day. Yet, most of these same individuals find time to let Hollywood say something to them every day via the television or the big screen. We

usually find time to let the *Reader's Digest*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *USA Today*, or the local daily newspaper say something to us every day. Why is it that a man can find time each day to read a 600-column newspaper, but the same man just cannot find time to read the Word of God? It all boils down to perfecting our priorities. We find time to do those things that are most precious to us.

Remember the heart in the parable of the sower that remained faithful. Do you remember why this heart was described as faithful? The reason is that they "having heard the word, keep it" (Luke 8:15). On another occasion Jesus said, "Blessed *are* they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Concerning Revelation, John wrote, "Blessed *is* he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein" (1:3). Therefore, one of the major keys to being a faithful Christian is to allow the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, to keep on remaining in us, that we might be strengthened thereby and not practice sin (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16; 1 John 3:9). The Bible each day helps keep the devil away.

Say Something to God Every Day

One of our greatest privileges and blessings as a Christian is also one which we often neglect—prayer to God. Jesus taught that men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1). *Faint* in this passage comes from a Greek word which means "to be remiss in duty, to be slothful." Hence, one of the purposes of prayer is to keep ourselves strong in the faith. If we are regular in prayer, we will not likely be slothful or remiss in our duty. Saying something to God every day in prayer has a way of strengthening our faith. Some years ago, in the midst of pre-marital counseling, a preacher told my wife and me, "It's hard to do wrong when you are praying to do right." Someone else has said, "Prayer will either make a man leave off sinning or sin will make him leave off prayer."

The apostle Paul admonished the Ephesians to be strong in the Lord by putting on the whole armor of God. The reason for doing so was that they might stand against the wiles of the devil. Paul wanted the Ephesians to be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. Thus he wrote, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:17-18). Please observe the tremen-

dous emphasis Paul ascribes to the power of prayer in maintaining faithful Christianity in a world where Satan walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). No wonder someone said, "A lot of kneeling keeps you in good standing with God." Many times we cannot get the courage to stand on our feet until we first get on our knees.

Our perfect example and role model, Jesus Christ, attributed great importance to the power of prayer in getting Him through the daily affairs of life upon earth. In fact, He assigned such importance to prayer that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). The Lord prayed all night before He selected His apostles (Luke 6:12). He prayed so fervently as He faced the shadow of the cross that He was in agony and "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). He believed so much in the power of prayer to help keep us faithful that He taught His disciples to pray: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mat. 6:13). Prayer is a powerful weapon in overcoming temptation. Therefore, let us say something to God every day!

Say Something for God Every Day

We can say something for God every day in at least two ways. First, we can say something for God by our manner of life, which is what Paul had in mind when he exhorted the Philippians to let their conduct be worthy of the Gospel (Phi. 1:27). He reminded the Corinthians that they were an epistle, known and read of all men (2 Cor. 3:2). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded His hearers to let their lights so shine before men that the Father in heaven might be glorified (Mat. 5:16). Paul echoed this sentiment when he told the Philippians that they were to shine forth as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Phi. 2:16). As the song says, "We are the only Bible this careless world will read... what if the type is crooked?; what if the print is blurred?"

In the second place, we can say something for God every day with our lips. The crux of the great commission has to do with our speaking up for God and proclaiming the saving gospel (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). In the midst of a secular world, our prayer should be "Lord... grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness..." (Acts 4:29). Far too many members of the Lord's church fail to say something for God,

because they are ashamed of the Gospel and some of the words of Jesus. We would do well to remember the words of Jesus: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). May we, like Paul, confidently proclaim that we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16).

Someone may ask: "But how does saying something for God every-day help one to resist temptation?" Such helps us to remain faithful because it is very, very hard to be sincerely speaking on behalf of God one minute, and defiantly violating His will the next. Furthermore, when we speak up for God and let the world know where we stand, some temptations are automatically reduced. This is true because some individuals in the world would not dream of asking someone who presents himself/herself as a Christian to go out and engage in certain sinful activities. Therefore, the more clearly we draw the line between us and the world and its ways, the more difficult it will be to cross that line and be conformed to the world and its carnal ways. Satan's children are not ashamed to say something for him every day by encouraging sin. Let us resolve to give God equal time by saying something for God every day.

Do Something for God Every Day

We are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (Jam. 1:22). Doing the things of God is not only our obligation and privilege; it is also a powerful means of keeping us faithful. It is more difficult to become entangled in the pollutions of the world when we are busy serving in the vineyard of the Lord. Paul exhorted the Galatians to remember the importance of doing something for God by doing something for their fellow man: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:9-10). It would not be an exaggeration to say that one of the separating factors between the lost and the saved on the day of judgment centers around what we have or have not done (Mat. 25:31-46). Those who did not do, will receive eternal punishment; those who did do, will receive life everlasting.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE ASK SUCH A QUESTION?

Initially, things looked bleak for Joseph after he asked the question and lived up to the principles of the question. However, as we have already observed, Joseph ended up being rewarded by God in a way he could not have imagined. If we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then we will imitate the heart of Joseph—we will love and respect God so much that when we are confronted with sin we will ask: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" With such an heart we will flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18). We will flee youthful lusts and follow instead righteousness, faith, charity, and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). We will abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11). We will love not the world, neither the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15).

If we do these things, we will be rewarded, just as Joseph was rewarded. However, our reward will be even greater than the earthly blessing he enjoyed of living in the palace of Pharaoh. Joseph lived in the midst of an earthly king—we will live in the midst of the King of kings! Meanwhile, we may face difficulties and burdens as did Joseph. There may be a very high price to pay for standing for the right. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Even if we do suffer for our faith, we must, like Joseph, look to the future and know that God will work all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Indeed, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to usward (Rom. 8:18). If we are pure in heart, we shall see God (Mat. 5:8), and we shall see Joseph. What a day that will be!

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“WHO HATH MADE MAN’S MOUTH?” EXODUS 4:11

Wayne Cox



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INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a woman who complained to an older Puritan preacher about the clerical bands he wore with his pulpit gown. She said that his bands annoyed her greatly because they were too long. So offensive were they, in fact, that this poor soul had not heard a word of his sermons for worrying about them. She said, “I’ve brought some shears to cut off those bands, with your permission, of course.” The preacher quietly agreed and handed her the offending bands. The woman took her scissors and went to work, cutting the bands and handing the fragments back to the preacher. As he was putting his now shortened bands back on, he said to the woman, “Now, my good woman, there is something about you that is altogether too long and that has annoyed me greatly. And, since one good turn deserves another, I would like your permission to cut it off.” “Certainly,” she said, “you have my permission and here are the scissors.” Whereupon the wise preacher said, “Very well, madam, stick out your tongue” (Macartney 396).

While we do not agree with the wearing of clerical clothing, we certainly can identify with the plight of that preacher! How many folks like that woman need their tongues shortened? And, if we are honest,

we have to admit that our own tongues could use some paring on occasion. As one observed: “A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use” (Irving).

Our assignment is to discuss this question, asked of Moses by God, “Who hath made man’s mouth?” Since the mouth is so often used in ungodly ways, one might conclude that the answer to that question would be Satan. Yet, Scripture records man’s having been created by God, which would include every facet of man, including his mouth.

We shall note the following objectives in this study: (1) the context in which the question is found; (2) some ungodly uses of man’s mouth; and (3) some godly uses of man’s mouth.

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

The setting is Exodus, which records the deliverance of God’s people, the Israelites, from Egyptian bondage. Exodus is actually a continuation of Genesis, with a gap of about three hundred years of silence between the two books. About four hundred years before the birth of Moses, Joseph was born to patriarch Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons, prompting jealousy on their part. Eventually, they sold Joseph to a group of traders, who in turn sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s bodyguard, in Egypt. Through a providential chain of events, Joseph was eventually elevated to Egypt’s prime minister, answering only to Pharaoh. He carefully planned for a predicted famine that came, thus sparing not only the land of Egypt from starvation but other people as well, including his own family. Eventually, Joseph’s family left Canaan, and, at the invitation of Pharaoh himself, came to live in Egypt, in a fine spread of land called Goshen. At that time, Jacob and his descendants were only a small band of people.

As the years passed, Jacob’s family became richer and richer and acquired more land in Goshen. Also, his family began to multiply as his sons married and had children. Even though Joseph and that generation would die, there was still economic and family growth for the Israelites, so much so that after three hundred years when Moses was born, the Jews had become a mighty people in Egypt. Of course, all of this occurred to the dismay and disappointment of the new Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

The new Pharaoh felt threatened by the presence of the Jews; he feared their joining enemy armies in war, and turning upon the Eryp-

tians. Pharaoh's fear soon turned to brutality, as he began an onslaught of oppression: "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens" (Exo. 1:11). Remarkably, the more the Hebrews were afflicted, the more they grew; and, the more they grew, the greater the fear of Pharaoh and his increased brutality against them.

God, behind the scenes, was planning to deliver His people through His chosen man, Moses. Exodus 3-4 record God's call of Moses and Moses' reluctance at first to heed that call. In fact, Moses began offering a number of excuses to God as to why he felt incapable and incompetent of the task of delivering Israel; some of those objections concerned Moses' speaking ability. Moses felt an inadequacy in knowing what to say to Israel: "What shall I say?" (Exo. 3:13). God's response: "Say...I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exo. 3:14). I AM is the One Who has always been and Who always will be—a declaration of God's eternal and unchanging existence.

However, for Moses, that did not suffice, as he continued to protest against heeding God's call. Another excuse given was, "*I am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exo. 4:10). In essence, Moses states he is not an eloquent speaker, literally, a "man of words." (There is a Jewish tradition to the effect that Moses had difficulty pronouncing certain characters of the alphabet.) However, God was not moved by this objection. He knew Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). In fact, this excuse of Moses was really a reflection on God, for as the Almighty responded:

Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say (Exo. 4:11-12).

Eventually, God would arrange for Aaron to be Moses' mouthpiece; and, finally, Moses would stop making excuses and start following the will of God.

How often are we like Moses? How often do we excuse ourselves from the Lord's work by feelings of inadequacy when it comes to speaking? Such did not hinder the apostle Paul:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God... And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's

wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:1, 3-4).

Such has not hindered others, as some have overcome speech impediments to become Gospel preachers, and others, despite stammering, preach every opportunity they can.

Since God made man’s mouth, it behooves us all to use it effectively in His service. Yet, before noting some ways of doing that, let us first consider some of the many abuses:

UNGODLY USES OF MAN’S MOUTH

About two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit inspired James to write the following about that mighty muscle in our mouths:

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; *it is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (Jam. 3:5-8).

It is somewhat ironic, is it not? We can tame elephants to perform tricks in a circus, Lassie and Flipper to be stars on television, Shamu the killer whale to jump over a rope, and crocodiles to be put to sleep by rubbing their stomachs, but we cannot tame a tiny two-ounce slab of muscle in our mouth! The most ferocious beast alive today finds its den behind our teeth; all too often, it runs wild and free, and how vicious it can be! What damage it can do!

The tongue can be so deadly that Jesus issued one of the sternest warnings in all the New Testament concerning its use: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Mat. 12:36).

Of course, the tongue is no more to blame for saying the wrong things than the hand is to blame for hitting someone or the foot for kicking someone; the real culprit lies just a few inches from the tongue—it is the heart of man.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh (Luke 6:45).

The tongue is neither friend nor foe, but is merely a messenger that delivers the information from the heart to the world. Thus, if we have

a tongue problem, we have a heart problem; the following “sins of the mouth” indicate evils in the heart:

Lying

Lying is the deliberate telling of an untruth.

These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: A proud look, a **lying tongue**, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness *that speaketh lies*, and he that soweth discord among brethren (Pro. 6:16-19).

Of the seven abominations the Lord loathes, three concern man’s mouth! Two of those specify lying, and how devastating they can be! In fact, as this author pens these words, a congregation of the Lord’s church is in turmoil all because of this wrong use of the tongue. Vicious lies have been originated and spread, and, without bothering to check the veracity of such, members not only believe those lies, but tell them to others. Such wreaks havoc on the body of Christ!

Slander and Gossip

Another ungodly use of man’s mouth and close kin to lying would be slander and gossip—the malicious circulation of false or exaggerated reports about another person, based on hearsay, rather than fact. Some of the most penetrating words in the book of Proverbs are directed toward these sins, and for good reason! Only God knows how many friendships, reputations, marriages, and churches have been destroyed by such.

He that hideth hatred *with* lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, *is* a fool.... A talebearer revealeth secrets.... froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.... The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly (Pro. 10:18; 11:13; 16:28; 18:8).

However, not only does gossip include that which is false, it also consists of things that are true but should not be repeated. Private conversations aired publicly can cause untold damage. How then do we know when to share information with others? We can consider these questions: (1) Is it true? If we cannot check the source, then we should not tell it, and it helps to make sure the source is reliable! (2) Is it confidential? Did someone tell us information in confidence? If so, bury it! One of the hallmarks of a preacher is his ability to maintain confidentiality. If he loses that, he loses a congregation’s confidence. Yet, such discretion should also be characteristic of every Christian.

(3) Is it kind? Will it build up another? If not, why tell it? (4) Is it necessary? Does anyone else need to know about it? If not, why fill the air with words? Most would agree that we rarely feel sorry for things we did not say, but we wish we could sever our tongues for things we did say, but should not have. The poet said:

If your lips would keep from slips,
Five things observe with care:
Of whom you speak, to whom you speak,
And how, and when, and where (Norris).

A wonderful verse to commit to memory concerning our speech is Ephesians 4:29: "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."

Profanity

Profanity is another ungodly use of man's mouth. "A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life: but perverseness therein *is* a breach in the spirit.... *There is* a generation *that* curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother" (Pro. 15:4; 30:11). We hear vulgarity of speech practically everywhere—on television, at the movies, in sporting events, at work, at school, and, God forbid, sometimes on the church parking lot! Profane speech has become a problem of all age groups, young and old alike. Little children learn profanity at an early age:

I lost a very little word, only the other day
It was a really nasty word I had not meant to say,
But then, it was not really lost when from my lips it flew,
My little brother picked it up and now he says it too.

Even the apostle Peter had a problem with profanity, as, at the arrest of Jesus, he denied the Lord three times, the last with cursing and swearing. From that moment on, no one connected Peter with Jesus any more, because in their eyes, a man who talked like that was no part of the Savior.

Using vulgar language is not a sign of maturity, machismo, or power, but is very much indicative of weakness. One who has to resort to an off-color word to express himself is a feeble person indeed!

Incessant Talking

Incessant talking would also be in the category of ungodly uses of man's mouth. There are some who feel they must comment on everything—they get in the last word, the first word, and practically every

other word in between! Solomon has some sage counsel for such individuals:

He that hath knowledge spareth his words: *and* a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: *and* he that shutteth his lips *is esteemed* a man of understanding (Pro. 17:27-28).

As has so often been said, “Better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt!” “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips *is wise*” (Pro. 10:19).

Enough of that. Let us turn our attention now to some positive thoughts, noting a few:

GODLY USES OF MAN’S MOUTH

Preaching the Gospel—Teaching the Lost

How imperative that we use man’s mouth in godly ways to proclaim the good news of Jesus! Our work is urgent today in light of the world’s fluctuating population, which has now surpassed the six billion mark (Lederer 9A). It is roughly estimated that four babies are born per second, 129 million per year, and that two people die per second, 56 million per year on this planet (U.S. Census Bureau)—most of whom have never even heard of Christ and are headed to eternity in a lost condition!

When we became Christians, we were given the responsibility and privilege of teaching others the truth; after all, that is what others have done for us! Would you be a Christian today, if someone had not taught you?

It has been said, “Every saint this side of heaven ought to be concerned with every sinner this side of hell,” and “The church that does not evangelize will fossilize.” However, what is of paramount importance is what God has said: “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), and “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Is there a more vital need than this for the mouth of man that God has made?

Encouragement

Obviously, all believers are in need of encouragement as we live and labor for Christ. It was the actress Celeste Holm who said: “We live by encouragement and die without it—slowly, sadly, and angrily” (484). Encouragement has been defined as the “oil that lubricates the soul and keeps it from grinding to a rusting halt.” Paul said, “Let us therefore

follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). Thus, from words of a secular nature, and from words of an inspired nature, we see the value of encouragement. As Crabb observed:

A well-timed word has the power to urge a runner to finish the race, to rekindle hope when despair has set in, to spark a bit of warmth in an otherwise cold life, to trigger healthful self-evaluation in someone who doesn’t think much about his shortcomings, to renew confidence when problems have the upper hand (25).

Reproof, Rebuke, Exhortation

Wise is the individual who listens to, sees the value in, and appreciates needed correction: “A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent” (Pro. 15:5). Though at times difficult and delicate, a friend will lovingly give words of warning, since “faithful *are* the wounds of a friend” (Pro. 27:6). The one who wounds does so because he is genuinely concerned about the one he is wounding. He anguishes over words that must be spoken and prays things will be said in the right way. What preacher cannot identify with such, as necessary sermons of reproof must be delivered on occasion? One who claims friendship while restraining reproof really is not a friend: “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Pro. 27:17).

CONCLUSION

Indeed, Moses gave excuses as to why he did not think he should be Israel’s deliverer—one of which was his alleging he was not a capable speaker. Finally, having aroused God’s anger, Moses changed his mind, stopped resisting God, and began trusting Him. He answered God’s call, not only to return to Egypt, but also to deliver God’s people from bondage. In short, Moses began using the mouth God had made and the power God would provide to achieve a tremendous victory for Israel.

How are we using the mouth God has made? For good? For the edifying of the body of Christ? For teaching the lost? For encouraging the discouraged? For warning the wayward? Or, for evil? Do we lie? Do we gossip? Do we slander? Do we curse? Do we know when to speak and when to be silent?

The wise man said, “Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue” (Pro. 18:21). Indeed, the way we use our mouth can impact both others and ourselves for eternity!

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“HOW LONG WILT THOU REFUSE TO HUMBLE THYSELF BEFORE ME?” EXODUS 10:3

Paul Vaughn



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INTRODUCTION

One of the most rewarding and interesting studies a student of history can engage in is an investigation of ancient Egypt and the pharaohs. Ancient Egypt was a place of mystery and wonder. It is said that Egypt is the “gift of the Nile.” The Nile River is the longest river in the world and the only major river to flow south to north. The source of the Nile River is Lake Victoria in Uganda, which is located in the East African mountains and flows for about four thousand miles to the Mediterranean Sea. The seasonal flooding of the Nile enabled the land to support the Egyptians. In ancient times the monarchs who ruled over Egypt and its vast riches were called Pharaoh. *Pharaoh* means “great-house” and was first used to describe the royal palace, but in time it became the title of the king of Egypt himself.

Pharaoh was the secular and religious ruler of Egypt. Acting as commander and chief of the powerful Egyptian army, he looked to the “gods of Egypt” to bless his efforts. Yet, Pharaoh was considered by the

Egyptians to be more than a king. He was regarded as a “god.” Students of Egyptian history differ as to the extent of their belief of the sacredness of the living Pharaoh, which fluctuates with the different time-periods and dynasties of Egypt.

In this treatise there is one Pharaoh that our study will focus upon. This Pharaoh would not humble himself before the One True God. He had great power and royal status in the land of Egypt, but he had no power when faced with the Almighty God, the Ruler of the universe. Moses and Aaron had a message for Pharaoh. It was from the One who was in control of the world, and it was directed to a man who thought he was in control of the world. The Greater demanded humility from the lesser. “And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exo. 10:3). A better understanding of the Egyptian’s religion during this time period would show the forces God’s servants, Moses and his brother Aaron, were facing when they came up against the powerful Pharaoh. Only then will one appreciate and be able to fully grasp the difficulties Moses and Aaron had in teaching that God was in control of the world, and not Pharaoh nor the gods of Egypt.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PERCEPTION OF “GOD”

The kings of Egypt were viewed as more than just heads of the empire.

He was a discrete and essential element within the cosmos. His unique position alongside the gods, humankind and the spirits of the deceased (*ankhs*), was necessary to maintain *ma’at*, the divine order (Silverman 108).

The Egyptians believed that Pharaoh held the universe in order and kept it from destruction. The kings of Egypt were very effective in encouraging this mythology because it gave them power on earth.

It was taught that Pharaoh filled the role of the

god Horus, son of Osiris. His title *Sa-Re* (‘Son of Re), first attested in the Fourth Dynasty clearly indicates that the monarch was regarded as the living decedent of the sun-god. A pharaoh acquired this deified status upon his coronation (Silverman 108).

In the 1987 Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship book, *The Book of Exodus*, Keith Mosher, Sr., did an excellent job in his lecture dealing with the theme “Critical Introduction to Exodus” titled “Back-

ground and Chronology." Brother Mosher brought out in his lesson that the sincere student of God's Word does not need extra-biblical sources of confirmation for the Old Testament (289). "The concise statements of the writers are accurate" (289). To this we say, "Amen." Brother Mosher also gave a brief chronology of the Pharaohs. He demonstrated that Thutmose III (1501-1447) was the Pharaoh of the oppression of the Jews (Exo. 1:8-17) and Amenhotep II (1447-1420) was Pharaoh during the exodus. There is a very interesting description about the pharaohs and, in particular, Thutmose III, in *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* by Erik Hornung and translated by John Baines. It said:

The king, like the cult image of a god, is normally hidden, being separated from the people in his palace. But when he steps outside and "is manifest" to his subjects, surrounded by symbols of power and protection, he becomes the *deus praesens* for the adulating and rejoicing people, allowing them to feel the presence of the creator god, whose deeds he accomplishes again. What he does is "not the work of men"; his words are "the utterances of god himself" (139).

Therefore, when Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exo. 10:3). The king would view the God the Hebrews worshiped and served as inferior to the gods of Egypt and his power.

THE SIN OF PRIDE

Websters defines *pride*: "An unduly high opinion of oneself; exaggerated self-esteem; conceit b) haughty behavior resulting from this; arrogance." In the Old Testament the wicked man in his pride is seen as an enemy of the poor and is contemptible to God.

The wicked in *his* pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, *whom* the LORD abhorreth (Psa. 10:2-3).

God warns man against the sin of pride in the Old and New Testaments. Solomon said, "The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate" (Pro. 8:13). He also wrote, "An high look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin" (Pro. 21:4). Paul warned that in the last days men will be lovers of themselves and prideful.

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 (2 Tim. 3:1-2).

The sin of pride was not invented by the Pharaohs, nor is it a characteristic only exhibited by the kings of Egypt. Pride was a characteristic of many of the women in Jerusalem during the time of Isaiah. Isaiah warned the women of coming destruction because of their pride.

Moreover the LORD saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing *as* they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts (Isa. 3:16-17).

The arrogance and the pride of Nebuchnezzar, the king of Babylon, is seen in his taking glory for all the splendor of kingdom of Babylon for himself. “The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). God humbled the king of Babylon by causing him to suffer the humiliating experience of dwelling in the fields like an animal for a period of time (Dan. 4:31-34).

Herod Agrippa I is another monarch who suffered because an over-exaggerated perception of self. He killed “James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:2). James was the first apostle to die for the Lord Jesus. After Herod killed James, he intended to kill Peter because he desired to please the Jews. This attempt to be pleasing to the Jews failed because of God’s intervention. Herod, in making a speech, allowed accepted praise that belonged to God and died for his arrogance.

And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost (Acts 12:21-23).

Pride will keep one from following the Lord. It is the attitude that is totally void of love for God, because a person loves himself more than he loves God.

HUMILITY IS AN ATTRIBUTE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The characteristic of humility is not a popular attitude among most people. If one is to please God, he must have a humble heart, because it is an essential ingredient of righteousness.

Nebuchadnezzar learned the importance of humility the hard way, as did Herod. They had no desire to please God because their pride came between them and seeking the will of God. *Humble* was not in Pharaoh's vocabulary as it would pertain to his disposition. He was used to having people humble themselves before him, but he never thought of developing humility as a way of life.

Pharaoh saw the God the Hebrews worshiped, at best, as small and insufficient. He was king of Egypt, the most powerful nation on earth, at that time. He was worshiped as a god and considered himself as a divine being. Therefore, he must learn the lessons of humility and the need to be righteous in the sight of God the hard way.

PHARAOH LEARNS THE LESSONS OF HUMILITY AND THE NAME JEHOVAH

When Moses was eighty years old, he was commissioned by God to deliver a message to the king of Egypt. Moses received his commission at the burning bush. God said:

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exo. 3:9-10).

When Moses received the authorization from God to go back to Egypt and free the people, he began to make excuses. His first was the people would not believe him (Exo. 4:1). Then he said that he was not an eloquent speaker (Exo. 4:10). Therefore, God appointed Aaron, Moses' brother, to speak for him (Exo. 4:14-15).

When Moses and Aaron first appeared before the king of Egypt, their message was, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness" (Exo. 5:1). Pharaoh's reply to Moses and Aaron was arrogant and straight to the point. He said, "Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo. 5:2). This begins a progression of plagues to teach Pharaoh who the Lord is and that there is a God who works in the lives of men, and He is in control of the universe, not the idols of Egypt. His name is "Jehovah." "Jehovah" is the English rendering of the Hebrew *YHWH*, (*Yahweh*). It is called the Tetragrammaton.

The Sacred, (tet×rah-gram×ah-tahn; Gk., “four letters”), the designation for the four Hebrew consonants yhwh that comprise the name of Israel’s God (Exod. 3:15; 7:2). The name itself was considered by the Hebrews as too holy to utter so the word “Lord” (Heb. adonai) was substituted when the text was read. The hybrid word “Jehovah” is a combination of the vowels of “Adonai” with the consonants of the tetragrammaton (Achtemeier 1036).

The Egyptians knew the names of many gods. They worshiped “Ra,” the god of the sun. He was their supreme Deity. They believed Ra defeated the darkness of night and rose in victory each morning. They also worshiped Hapi, the god of the Nile; Heket, the water goddess who took the form of a frog; Hathor, the goddess of the sky who had the head of a cow; Imhotep, the god of medicine; Cobra, the goddess of immortality; Shu, the god of the atmosphere; Bes, generally different dwarf gods with monstrous faces; Horus, the god of the sky and of the kingship who took the form of a hawk; Isis, the sister and the wife of Osiris; Osiris, was the god of the dead; and Apis the sacred bull of Memphis. These are the names of the gods the Egyptians idolized and served their images. However, there is a new name that they would learn, and would come to know that the idols of Egypt are but dust in the wind before Him.

When Pharaoh said, “Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Exo. 5:2). One would not think that Pharaoh was unacquainted with the name of the God of the Israelites. It is most likely that Pharaoh was rejecting the authority of Jehovah over the gods of Egypt and his power. Therefore, he said he would not obey His voice. The plagues would teach Pharaoh and the Egyptian people that they would submit to the purposes of the Lord.

There were ten plagues suffered by Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. Each one would cause them to lose trust in their gods and Pharaoh as god.

1. Turning the Nile river water into blood (Exo. 7:14-25)
2. Frogs (Exo. 8:1-15)
3. Lice (Exo. 8:16-19)
4. Flies (Exo. 8:20-32)
5. Murrain on the cattle (Exo. 9:1-7)
6. Boils (Exo. 9:8-12)
7. Hail (Exo. 9:13-35)

8. Locusts (Exo. 10:1-20)
9. Darkness (Exo. 10:21-28)
10. The death of the first born of all Egypt (Exo. 12:29-36).

The Egyptian people suffered greatly because of their idolatry and the arrogance of Pharaoh. The plagues the Egyptian people went through were done because of Pharaoh's ceaseless and willful rejection of God.

A STIFF-NECK AND A HARDENED HEART

The king of Egypt had a stiff-neck, one that would not bow to anyone. Each time Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh giving God's message to "let the people go," he hardened his heart setting his will against God. The plagues discredited Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt; yet, Pharaoh's stiff-neck and hardened heart was like rock. He would not humble himself to obey God.

The writer of Hebrews said, "God *is* a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). He will consume the self-willed disobedient sinner. He showed long-suffering with Pharaoh as He shows longsuffering with men today. Pharaoh thought that he could contend with God and be victorious. The destruction of the host of Egypt and the deliverance of the Israelites was a demonstration of God's power.

God is just as powerful today as He was during the exodus. He is still longsuffering toward men giving them the opportunity to obey Him. Peter said, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Just as it was in the life of Pharaoh, the day of reckoning is coming to all. Those who will be victorious are the ones who do not have a stiff-neck or a hardened heart. Humility is a fundamental principle in the lives of Christians. Their spirit is void of pride and self-righteousness. Bowing the head to God and opening up the heart to His teaching shows implicit trust in God's will.

Humility was exemplified in the life and the teaching of Jesus. He said, "But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:31). From this verse it is easily seen that God's way often contradicts human expectations.

CONCLUSION

The history of ancient Egypt is great riches, great military power, and great forms and numbers of idols they worshiped. The riches, military power, and forms of idolatry are just as predominant in modern times. Man has become *god*, setting his own standard and walking by his own rules.

The humility that is required to be pleasing to God is very different from the materialistic and humanistic society of modern America. Everyone is seeking happiness. Some believe that happiness is found in science. Others believe that happiness is achieved through satisfaction of temporal desires. These avenues to fulfill the desires of the heart have become gods to many people. The simplistic patterns found in the Scriptures are unknown in the heart of man. Yet, it is the desire of God to save people from the punishment for sin. Jesus came to make reconciliation possible for mankind. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10).

The question to Pharaoh was: "Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me? let my people go, that they may serve me" (Exo. 10:3). The question is the same to all men today. To be able to humble one's self before God, one must be willing to sacrifice everything to please the Lord. It would entail the forfeit of worldly pleasures, worldly friends, and one's own selfishness in surrender to God. Pharaoh was not willing to humble himself before God; therefore, he received the wrath of God's punishment.

The Solomon said, "The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth" (Pro. 8:13). We pray that this attitude will be prevalent in the heart of man today.

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“WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE?”

EXODUS 32:26

Tom L. Bright



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INTRODUCTION

It is sad that many members of the body of Christ do not like to study the Old Testament. Yea, even more sad is the fact some actually argue there is no need to study it. However, every serious student of God’s Word realizes this is not the case. The two testaments are inseparable and together they make up the One Book, the Bible, the only inspired revelation of God to man.

On the pages of the Old Testament we see the creation of the heavens and the earth and all things therein. The crowning touch of God’s creation was man, created in the image of the great **I Am**. God gave this creation that which we call free moral agency, the ability to make choices. Soon, man was confronted with temptation and succumbed to its allurements. The results of his choice was separation from God. However, inspiration reveals that God instituted a plan to allow man to come again into His Divine presence.

This plan involved the descendants of Abraham through Isaac through Jacob. After moving to Egypt, they became a great and mighty nation. God had promised Abraham his descendants would inhabit the land where he stood. My assignment has to do with God’s determination to bring the Israelites out of Egypt into the land promised to them.

After God brought them out of Egypt with might and power, He led them to the foot of Mt. Sinai. God then called Moses to the top to receive the law. While Moses was there, the Israelites approached Aaron, Moses brother, and demanded of him: “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him” (Exo. 32:1). Aaron acquiesced and made a golden calf for them, which they immediately began to worship. God spoke to Moses, telling him what the Israelites had done. Jehovah then said:

I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation (Exo. 32:9-10).

In the next four verses, we read Moses’ intercessory prayer which shows the very nature of this man. He prayed:

And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* for ever (Exo. 32:11-13).

God heard the desires of His faithful servant and “repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (Exo. 32:14).

When Moses, with his companion Joshua, came into the camp, he confronted his brother for the sinful deed he (Aaron) had done. Aaron gives no real answer to Moses’ question, other than to try and shift the blame to the children of Israel.

We then read:

And when Moses saw that the people *were* naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto *their* shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who *is* on the LORD’S side? *let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him (Exo. 32:25-26).

A crisis had arisen in Israel. They had introduced idol worship into the nation. It is no wonder Moses cried out: “Who *is* on the LORD’S side?” What was going to happen to the people now? Would they turn from

their sin and turn to God, or would they proceed deeper into the depravity they were now practicing? Had they gone so far into this sin they had reached that famous *point of no return*? Thus, we can see the seriousness of this famous saying of the Old Testament.

WHAT IS IMPLIED BY "ON THE LORD'S SIDE"?

If one is standing exactly where God would have him to stand, he is "on the LORD'S side." When one is "on the LORD'S side," he is teaching and practicing that which is acceptable to Jehovah. His words, deeds, and actions are controlled by the revealed will of God.

Joshua challenged his contemporaries to "choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Jos. 24:15). They responded exactly like every person should respond when confronted with the same question: "God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods" (Jos. 24:16). What a marvelous world it would be if every person had the same attitude as Joshua's listeners. The Lord's church would truly be great today if every person claiming to be a New Testament Christian would be of the same mind as these people. However, the majority of Christians do not answer in this fashion.

Joshua called upon the people to make a choice. This is in total agreement with the nature of man. God endowed every human with free moral agency, that is, the ability to choose whether or not they will follow God. Those who choose to walk in the path of righteousness are those who are "on the LORD'S side."

Our life is one of *choice making*. In fact, it is such an intrinsic part of our existence we seldom stop to contemplate this truth. We need to be impressed with the fact that the results of our choices are going to follow us into eternity. In other words, our eternal destiny is being determined by the choices we make in this life. Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). We must realize, that of which we "shall give account" refers to the life we have lived here on earth, a life full of *choice making*.

It is amazing how our society has allowed itself to be lulled into accepting the philosophy man is not accountable for the consequences of the choices he makes. When an atrocious act (as man views it), such as a school shooting transpires, experts immediately begin looking into the background of the guilty, seeking the reason/reasons *why* the

dreadful deed was committed. Was it child abuse by a parent who in turn had been abused, or are there other extenuating circumstances which accounts for the dreadful act? Regardless of what they discover, there is the ever present *expert* affirming the perpetrator of the horrendous crime is not really guilty of the act.

This concept is foreign to the Scriptures. In instructions to the priests, God said the guilty “shall bear his iniquity” (Lev. 5:1; 5:17; 7:18; 17:16; 19:6; 20:17). The following passages clearly show man is accountable for the choices he makes and must suffer the consequences of such choices, regardless of whether they are good or bad. Paul wrote:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:7-8).

Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:24-25).

Who will render to every man according to his deeds (Rom. 2:6).

Man makes choices and must live with the consequences of those choices. The sexually promiscuous individual may have to suffer the consequences of AIDS, or an unwanted pregnancy may end in the woman assenting to legalized murder (abortion). When one takes that first drink of alcohol, he must understand the very real possibility his family may have to deal with an alcoholic in the family, and he could face certain debilitating diseases from which there is no respite. The individual who makes the first *small bet* does not understand he could easily be facing a gambling addiction that will destroy his family financially.

Many today boast of our *liberated society*, but there are consequences of such a society which manifests itself in many ways. Abortion is rampant. Sexual purity is held up to ridicule. Homosexuality is openly advocated and is practiced unashamedly. Immodesty is the rule rather than the exception and is defended by those who ought to know better. Adultery is not shunned but openly accepted. Divorce is allowed for any reason other than the only exception given by Jesus (Mat. 19:9). Drinking alcoholic beverages is accepted as the norm. In fact, socially speaking, if one does not drink alcohol, he is looked upon as *socially*

unacceptable, and the refusal to drink alcohol in a social setting is viewed as a personal affront to the host.

WHO IS ON THE “LORD’S SIDE”?

The Bible is replete with examples of men and women whose lives manifested what it means to be on the “LORD’S side.” The problem is not finding these great men and women of faith, but determining which ones to mention. Paul was faced with the same problem. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, he specifically mentioned many Old Testament worthies by name. He then wrote, “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and *of* Barak, and *of* Samson, and *of* Jephthae; *of* David also, and Samuel, and *of* the prophets” (Heb. 11:32). In essence, this great apostle to the Gentiles is saying the list of those who made the choice to be “on the Lord’s side” is virtually unending.

However, what he writes in the subsequent verses is something all should stop and consider. He wrote:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of *cruel* mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and *in* mountains, and *in* dens and caves of the earth (11:33-38).

As we meditate on the implications of these words, we are in awe at the magnitude of the suffering faced by those who chose to be “on the LORD’S side.” Who were these nameless and faceless people? We do not know. What did they look like? This is not revealed. However, God knows all about these people!

On June 1, 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill designating November 11th as Veteran’s Day, proclaiming it as an occasion for honoring veterans of all wars. Each year on this day in November, there is an impressive ceremony that transpires at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Many of us have watched with a lump in our throat, as the President of the United States deposits a wreath of

flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in honor of all those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country—their lives.

God also has his *Unknown Soldiers*. Just as man pays tribute to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, so God paid tribute to His Unknown Soldiers of yesteryear who suffered horrendous treatment at the hands of their enemies simply because they chose to be “on the LORD’S side.” These individuals of whom Paul wrote were looked upon by their contemporaries as the offscouring of the world, but to God they were viewed as faithful and dedicated servants.

They did not hold themselves up as superior to others. They had chosen to be “on the LORD’S side” and held to the purpose of being faithful to God. The world has always wanted God’s people to bow to its dictates, to follow its judgments, and submit to its desires. However, God has always called on His people to be faithful—some have heard and responded affirmatively to that call!

Sometimes it is said of famous people: “They were born at the right time.” This suggests if they had been born in a different time, they would not have been famous. For instance, would Dwight Eisenhower or Winston Churchill have received the level of fame they attained if it were not for World War II?

The truth is, Paul wrote of common, everyday people just like you and me. It cannot be said these people were “born at the right time” as we commonly use the term. Choosing to “be on the LORD’S side” has never been limited to a specific generation. From day one, faithfulness to God has always been expected. They had aches and pains just like man today. They were interested in their family just as we are today. Undoubtedly, they were downhearted and distressed as man is in our world. They were concerned about the everyday things of life just as we are. They had concerns about their family, neighbors, relatives, and their children. What kind of people were they? Just common, everyday people who had chosen to be faithful! They were the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” They came to the point they had to make a choice. The choice was between the *here and now* or the *there and then*. Because of their faith, they chose to “be on the LORD’S side.”

In one of the most astounding statements and greatest commendations found in holy Writ, we see God’s view of these great giants of faith. In verse thirty-eight Paul wrote, “Of whom the world was not worthy.” The words create in the heart of their readers a feeling of deepest respect, admiration, and awe for the dedication and consecra-

tion of these faithful people of God. They are the epitome of faithfulness and dedication when put to the test. In the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, they *stayed the course*. They were steadfast and unmovable regardless of the consequences. They were focused on what it meant to be "on the LORD's side," and nothing was going to prevent them from doing that very thing.

EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO WERE "ON THE LORD'S SIDE"

Abel is one who determined to be "on the LORD's side." Inspiration refers to him as one who "being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). This refers to his faithfulness in doing what God commanded. The event is recorded in Genesis 4:3-5. Moses wrote:

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

The reason Abel's offering was *more excellent* than Cain's was because it was *by faith*, which implies that God revealed exactly what He wanted. Abel obeyed God's command. He was "on the LORD's side."

Abraham is a classic example of one who was "on the LORD's side." Isaiah said of him, "But thou, Israel, *art* my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend" (Isa. 41:8). Here is a man who was called from his homeland by God and obeyed without hesitation. In fact, he was of such a nature God determined to bring the Savior of the world through the descendants of this great man. Inspiration refers to him as "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16).

When God commanded him to take Isaac, his only son, and offer him as a sacrifice to God, Abraham obeyed without hesitation (Gen. 22:1ff). Yes, it can truly be said of this man, he had chosen to be "on the Lord's side."

We must mention the faithful Moses. Inspiration says of him, "Now the man Moses *was* very meek, above all the men which *were* upon the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3). A few verses later God made clear His approval of Moses when He told Aaron and Miriam:

And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, *I* the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, *and* will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses *is* not so, who *is* faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even

apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? (Num. 12:6-8).

Moses is a classic example of faithfulness and dedication. Truly, it can be said he was “on the LORD’S side.”

David was one who exemplified this dedication to God. There is so much that can be said of this great man of God. Possibly inspiration pays the best tribute to him in saying, “Because David did *that which* was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any *thing* that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kin. 15:5). Surely all will agree, David was “on the LORD’S side.”

WHO IS *NOT* ON THE “LORD’S SIDE”?

Just as there are many we could name as being “on the LORD’S side,” so there are multitudes Inspiration points to as **not** being “on the LORD’S side.” This very chapter from which we get the title of this lesson depicts a whole nation which chose to turn from God. One familiar with Judges sees God’s people being punished because of their sin and degradation. After the rebellion of the people under Jeroboam resulting in the rise of the Northern kingdom, which came to be known as Samaria, we see this nation utterly destroyed by Assyria. Just over a century later, Judah went into Babylonian captivity because of wickedness.

After the establishment of the New Testament church, we read of Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:29-32) of damage that would be heaped upon the Lord’s church by those he referred to as *grievous wolves*. Peter told his readers there would be false teachers among them, just as there were false prophets among the Israelites in generations past (2 Pet. 2:1). Paul told Timothy of a future departure from the faith (2 Tim. 4:1-3).

It is evident, apostasy is not limited to any specific generation or to a particular century. God’s people have always had to deal with departures from the path that God wanted them to walk. It was not long after the great success of the “Restoration Movement” in America that another apostasy arose. In the forefront was the introduction of mechanical instruments of music into the worship of the New Testament church. Hard on its heels was the debate over the Missionary Society, a man-made institution to do the work of evangelism God had given to the church.

In the first part of the last century there were several problems of this same nature: One cup, Bible classes, women teachers in Bible classes, eating in the building, located preachers, and the ungodly doctrine of Premillennialism. In the 1950s there arose another problem dealing with the work of the church in the field of benevolence. The basic philosophy spread to the *how* of supporting preachers in the mission field.

Partly as a response to this *anti* movement, largely as a result of existentialism, pragmatism, and the Hegelian Dialecticism which was introduced into our education system through the efforts of John Dewey in the early part of this century, there arose another “ism” that has done immeasurable damage to the church. We call this *liberalism*.

It is not uncommon to hear *liberal* or *liberalism*, but as it pertains to the Lord’s church, what do we mean by *liberalism*? First of all, we do not have reference to a **liberal giver** or one who is **liberal** with their **time** relative to the work of the church. Our use of the word has reference to one who advocates a greater freedom of thought or action than that **which the Bible allows!** When this writer speaks of *liberalism* in the church, he has reference to an advocacy for a greater freedom of thought or action which ceases to follow the Bible and results in a course of doctrine and practice contrary to God’s will.

Based upon this basic philosophy, there is a constant cry for *change* from the liberal camp. Because of this, they have correctly been designated as “Change Agents.” In the *change agent* mind, anything and everything which makes the church of Christ what it is must be changed. Basically every item once held as fundamental a generation ago is now that which **must** be changed. Even though the liberal will not admit it, their concept is to *change* things just for the sake of change.

That which is to be changed is simple: If it pertains to that which **was**, it is under scrutiny by the liberal mind set. The “Change Agents” do not agree in every point as to how things are to be changed, but one thing is certain, **change there will be!**

Those leading the charge for this unscriptural change are many, far too numerous to mention in this lesson. However, the names of Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, Larry West, and Doug Foster will resonate with the reader.

Directly involved in this charade are two leading *Christian* schools. Their faculties are rife with those who are in the forefront of the

“Change Agent” movement. They are David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee and Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. Please understand this scribe is not affirming these are the **only** two schools involved in this apostasy. There are others who have shown themselves to be following the same path; they just have not gone as far as these two have gone. However, we confidently affirm that if drastic change is not made in the leadership of many of *our* schools, in a few years they will be where these two find themselves today.

Identifying Marks of the “Change Agent” Movement

In the following section, we will study various false doctrines that are held by most of these false teachers. Please understand, every “change agent” does not necessarily hold to each and every one of the following items.

One of the items held by some of these “Change Agents” is the rejection of the doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration. In other words, they do not believe the human writers of the Bible were guided by the Holy Spirit in the selection of the very words they used. Rather, their view is (at best) the Holy Spirit gave the individuals the basic thought, but left the choosing of the very words to the human instrument. However, the truth of the matter is the Holy Spirit chose the very words to be used, incorporating the background, education, and vocabulary of the individual (1 Cor. 2:8-16).

A second distinctive doctrine of these “Change Agents” is the advocacy of the subjective and relative nature of Bible Truth. This view holds the truth of any proposition depends upon the specific circumstances (events, persons, etc.) at that particular time, and that the truth of a proposition, regardless of whether it involves the same person or different people, might change from setting to setting. The results of this view are there is nothing that one can hold as the real teaching of the Bible, but every doctrine we hold is only as we view it to be, not as it necessarily is or as God really intended for it to be. Thus, Bible Truth is whatever you consider it to be—and it can change from person to person, event to event, day to day, minute to minute.

This philosophy stands in stark contract to the philosophy of the objective and absolute nature of Bible Truth. Affirming that Bible Truth is objective is to say Truth does exist and is not merely a mental concept, idea, or belief—and that it is not determined by emotion, surmise, or personal prejudice. If one picks up a yardstick and says, “I

am going to measure the length of that board," we understand that he has in his hand an objective standard. Furthermore, if the length of any other object he measures is exactly thirty-six inches, then that object is one yard in length. That principle was true yesterday, is true today, and will be true tomorrow.

For one to say that Truth is *Absolute* is to say the truth of a proposition is not changed by the conclusions regarding it drawn by various individuals. In other words, what the truth is today regarding any aspect of the doctrine of Christ is what it was yesterday and what it will be tomorrow, even if some people come to a totally different conclusion.

The doctrine of subjectivity and relativity argues we cannot be absolutely certain about anything. What would someone think if this author walked up and said, "I am absolutely certain a person cannot be absolutely certain about anything"? It does not take a rocket scientist to see the illogical rationale of that statement, but this is the implication of liberalism's view of the nature of Bible Truth.

A result of this philosophy is the "Change Agents" look upon the introduction of mechanical instruments of music into Christian worship as merely a matter of opinion.

They also affirm the ungodly doctrine of Premillennialism is merely a matter of opinion, even though this teaching strikes at the very sovereignty of the God of the Bible. Basic to Premillennialism is the doctrine that because national Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ, God postponed the kingdom idea and left the church in its place. It is asserted that someday in the future, Jesus Christ is coming back to earth to establish that kingdom He could not establish the first time He came! In the mind of the "Change Agent," this is nothing more than a *matter of opinion*, and should never be the cause of concern.

A third identifying mark of a "Change Agent" is the view the New Testament church as not of Divine origin. In their view, the church of Christ had its beginning during that period we call the Restoration Movement. They assert the restoration leaders did not restore anything, but established another denomination among many denominations. This we reject without apology or hesitation. The New Testament church was established by Jesus Christ on the first Pentecost following His resurrection (Acts 2:1-47).

The "Change Agents" do not consider a belief in the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ as essential. However, the very nature of Old Testament

prophecies concerning Him and all the Bible says about Christ implies this is a crucial Bible doctrine. If Jesus Christ was not born of a virgin, then He had a human father. If his father was human, He was not “God with us” (Mat. 1:23). If there is no virgin birth, there is no “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). Thus, the One we hold up as the Son of God was nothing more than another human being.

Liberalism constantly appeals for *Christian Unity*. However, they desire to attain it with a total **disregard** for God’s law of fellowship. The “Change Agent” extends the right hand of fellowship to any and all who even act as if they have some form of allegiance to Jesus Christ. The question in their mind is not, are they abiding “in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9)? To these false teachers, the *doctrine of Christ* exists only as an illusory, yet unreachable goal. It can truly be said, they are willing to fellowship everyone except those who refuse to fellowship everyone.

In the liberal mind, the purpose of baptism is not “for the remission of sins”; rather it is to obey God. Regardless of what denominationalism teaches about baptism, the “Change Agents” are willing to accept any denominational baptism. This is in total rejections of what the Bible teaches relative to this subject. Peter said it was “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), but, of course, the intelligentsia of the “Change Agent” movement knows much more about God’s will than an inspired apostle!

They have adopted the worn out denominational doctrine of *grace*. They like to emphasize *grace* and insist that we are not under *law* at all. This is openly advocated, in spite of the fact Paul wrote he was “under the law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). In Romans 3:27, the same writer stated, “Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” Again the “Change Agent” shows he has absolutely no regard for the Bible.

The liberal mind set says we have long misunderstood the proper place of women in the Church. They now argue women can do anything a man can do. This applies to waiting on the Lord’s table, leading public prayers, leading singing, etc. They care not that inspiration states, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12). To *usurp authority* means “to have authority over,” liberals notwithstanding.

Those bent upon changing the New Testament church reject what they call *pattern theology*. This is simply the idea there is no pattern at

all relative to what Christians are to teach, preach, or practice. To them, the Bible does not set forth a pattern to be acceptable to God, but is in reality a book of suggestions! The truth is, God has clearly set forth upon the pages of Inspiration a pattern that sets forth clearly what we are to teach, how we are to act, and how we are to worship. 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. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak (John 12:48-50).

In total disregard of what Jesus taught in Matthew 19:9 about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, these fable teachers have thrown open the doors of the church to fornicators. They will accept any person, regardless of the condition of their marriage relationship. If the person has been unscripturally divorced one, two, or more times, they accept them with open arms.

There are many other things that could be noted. However, we have neither the time nor the space to deal with them extensively. Let it suffice just to list some of them.

1. They openly ridicule the time honored practice of giving "book, chapter, and verse" for what they preach and practice. They weave everything but the Word of God into their sermons.
2. They openly defend *social drinking*.
3. They emphasize the *social* rather than the spiritual nature of the work of the church.
4. In their view, there is no such thing as an *act* of worship. Worship, we are told, is solely a matter of *attitude*.
5. They insist there is no inspired instruction relative to when we are to observe the Lord's Supper.
6. They stress emotionalism.
7. They show a tolerance toward *theistic evolution*.
8. There is an open denial of elders having any authority whatsoever, other than by example.

Those "Change Agents" are not "on the LORD'S side." They are false teachers, who of their own free will, are bent on destroying New Testament Christianity as it is revealed on the pages of inspiration.

CONCLUSION

Let each of us determine that we will look to the Bible as God's revelation of what each has to do to be saved and what each has to do to stay saved. May all of us have the fortitude to be "on the LORD's side," regardless of what it takes. This, and only this, will lead us to heaven.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHAT DOTHT THE LORD THY GOD REQUIRE OF THEE?” DEUTERONOMY 10:12; MICAH 6:8

Joe E. Galloway



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INTRODUCTION

There are six searching questions that have always concerned people throughout the world: (1) What are we? (2) Whence came we? (3) Where are we going? (4) Why are we here? (5) What is our danger? (6) Where will we exist eternally? Our question for consideration corresponds with the fourth of these searching questions and is closely related to the answers of each of the others.

This world did not come into existence by mere happenstance—it was created by God (Gen. 1:1). God did not create the world without reason: “He formed it to be inhabited” (Isa. 45:18). His expressed purpose was: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion...over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Being made **in God’s image** does not refer to our physical bodies. God is a Spirit

being, and it is our never-dying **spirit** with the power to reason and choose that is after God's likeness.

God had a reason for making man. He made man to bring Him glory! "For I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him" (Isa. 43:7). "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: **for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created**" (Rev. 4:11). In addition to the glory due Him through the creation, Christ is worthy to receive glory because He was the Lamb that "wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by [His] blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9, 13). Our existence, and all that God has done for us, should be reason enough for us to give Him willing service.

To fulfill our purpose for existence we must glorify God, but how is this done? It is done by our careful, loving obedience to His Word. This **obedience** that brings God glory is described as: letting our light shine (Mat. 5:16), bearing fruit (John 15:8), speaking and serving as God's Word authorizes (1 Pet. 4:11), and is to be done with both our body and spirit (1 Cor. 6:20). Jesus stated this way of having glorified God: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). Any glory that we bring to God during this Christian Age must be "in the church" (Eph. 3:21).

God placed man on this earth to give him the time and a place to prepare for eternity. There will be no more time to prepare after this life has ended (2 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 22:11). Our physical body on this earth is in an environment that tests our faith in God through hardships and temptations. Peter wrote, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ," and speaks of, "Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls" (1 Pet. 1:7, 9). This is connected with our receiving "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). Overcoming in all these tests of our faith assures us of being permitted to live with God in heaven forever (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

GOD HAS ALWAYS TESTED MAN'S FAITH BY REQUIRING OBEDIENCE

Adam and Eve in Eden

Man was made in a sinless condition and placed in a veritable paradise. In addition to the trees bearing fruit that was good for food were two other trees: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). God gave man the responsibility of dressing and keeping the garden, and gave this additional command: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17). With the command that tested man’s faith was connected a penalty for failure to obey—death! Adam’s disobedience brought death to all mankind (Rom. 5:12). This death was twofold: **spiritual death** (man was separated from God because of his sin—Isa. 59:2) and **physical death** (man’s spirit would eventually be separated from his body). “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and “the wages of sin *is* death” (Rom. 6:23).

Man has always begun life in a sinless condition. Adam and Eve were made in an upright condition; all others begin life as innocent infants. To the king of Tyrus God gave this message that describes the situation of all mankind: “Thou *wast* perfect in thy ways from the day that thou *wast* created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Eze. 28:15). Solomon wrote, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc. 7:29). Paul writes of his innocency until he became accountable to God and sinned in these words: “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9). “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Unless there is law, there cannot be sin. Paul wrote, “For where no law is, *there is* no transgression” (Rom. 4:15) and, “For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13). Sinless infants are not amenable to law. When one reaches the age of accountability, sin is committed. The conditions given by God for forgiveness, and then continued faithfulness, must then be met.

The Nation of Israel

God gave two main promises to Abraham: (1) to make a great nation from his seed, and (2) to bless all nations of the earth through one particular Seed (Gen. 12:2-3). God said He had specifically chosen Abraham to initially give these promises, “because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:17-18).

God formed the nation in the land of Egypt, then brought them to Mount Sinai to give them His law, to instruct them of His prescribed place and way of worship, and to further form them by tribes. When the law was given:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD (Exo. 24:3-4).

God said regarding the tabernacle—the center for His worship, “According to all that I shew thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make *it*” (Exo. 25:9).

Repeatedly, God warned Israel of their need to strictly obey His revealed will:

And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou *art* shall see the work of the LORD: for it *is* a terrible thing that I will do with thee. Observe thou that which I command thee this day (Exo. 34:10-11).

And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These *are* the words which the LORD hath commanded, that ye should do them (Exo. 35:1).

Bountiful blessings were promised “if ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them” (Lev. 26:3). Otherwise, numberless punishments, including their destruction as a nation, would come to them:

But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you (Lev. 26:14-16—see the remainder of the chapter).

Deuteronomy 10:12—*Deuteronomy* comes from the Greek Septuagint and is a combination of *deuteros* (second, or repeated) and

nomos (law). Much of its contents are repetitions of the law by Moses to Israel shortly before the time of his death and the time when Joshua would lead Israel on into the promised land of Canaan. Most of the adults who had been twenty years old and upward when the law had originally been given at Sinai were now dead. The law is now repeated to those who will be conquering the promised land. They will face two major temptations: the idolatry of the inhabitants of the land, and the complacency that will come when they have settled in Canaan. They will enjoy houses they have not built and crops they have not planted. Repeatedly, the warning is given that they must then beware lest they forget the God who so blessed them and turn from Him to idolatry (Deu. 6:10-14; 8:10-20).

Moses tells them that the manna had been given not only to feed them but:

to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live (Deu. 8:2-3).

His exact instructions regarding what days they were to gather the manna, how much, and the provisions regarding the Sabbath were to instill in their minds the need to be exact in obeying His instructions to them—a lesson that some were slow to learn (Exo. 16:4-5, 16-31).

After reminding them again of God’s wish “that they may go in and possess the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give unto them” (Exo. 10:11), the question of this lesson is asked and answered:

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all the heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deu. 10:11-13).

Oberst well comments, “One cannot help but see in these passages that God demanded the *heart* of his servants in the *Old Testament*” (152). This text emphasizes this further by saying, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deu. 10:16). Physical circumcision was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and his physical descendants (Gen. 17:11), but it did no good unless their hearts were purified in wanting to do God’s will (also

see Jer. 4:4). These Scriptures prepare us to understand the basis by which God considers one a true *Jew* today (Rom. 2:28-29).

Solomon's Search and Conclusion

Ecclesiastes records Solomon's search for that which makes life profitable. After trying such things as wisdom and material possessions, and concluding that these are all "vanity and vexation of spirit" (literally, "chasing the wind"), he reached this inspired conclusion:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Followers of Christ

That God still tests our faith by our obedience is shown in many Scriptures. Jesus asks, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). He indicates that not merely the avowal of Him as Lord, but doing the will of the Father in heaven, is essential to entering the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 7:21). The faith that saves is the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6). James indicates that we show our faith by our works, and that faith is made perfect by such works (Jam. 2:18, 22). Baptism, itself, is a command of God that is connected with one's faith (Acts 10:48; Mark 16:16).

THE MICAH 6:8 TEXT

Micah means "who is likened unto Jehovah?" and is a shortened form of *Micaiah* (although he is not that prophet of 1 Kings 22 who faithfully prophesied some 150 years earlier). He prophesied in the last half of the eighth century B.C. during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Mic. 1:1). Over a century later Jeremiah quoted him regarding Jerusalem's impending destruction by Babylon (Jer. 26:18). Micah was the only prophet that prophesied the place of Jesus' birth (Mic. 5:2); so the chief priests and scribes quoted this to Herod when the wise men had come inquiring for the location of "he that is born King of the Jews" (Mat. 2:1-6).

According to Thiele (75), Jotham reigned from c. 750-732 B.C.—the first part as co-regent with Azariah—he is known as a good king, 2 Kin. 15:32-35); Ahaz succeeded Jotham c. 732-715 B.C. and was evil (2 Kin. 16:1-4); his son Hezekiah reigned c. 715-686 B.C. and "trusted in the LORD God of Israel" (2 Kin. 18:5), restoring the temple and

God’s designated worship there (2 Chr. 29-31). Homer Hailey comments:

Had it not been for the rule of the good King Hezekiah and the diligent and fearless preaching of Isaiah and Micah, it is probable that Judah would have gone the way of Israel. However, by the providence of God enough spiritual “salt” was found to save the land and the people from ruthless destruction by Assyria (188).

Background of the Book of Micah

The Assyrian power dominated the political scene at the time of Micah. Syria (capital city, Damascus) was threatened by Tiglathpileser III, Assyria’s king. Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel, attempted to get Judah to join them against Assyria. When Judah refused, Rezin and Pekah besieged Ahaz in Jerusalem, but were not able to prevail (2 Kin. 16:5; Isa. 7:4-7). At that time Ahaz made the mistake of sending messengers, along with silver and gold from the house of the Lord, to Tiglathpileser with the request that he save Judah from Syria and Israel. Assyria’s king “hearkened unto him,” took Damascus, and carried the people away captive (2 Kin. 16:7-10). Damascus was conquered in 732 B.C. Gill correctly remarks regarding Ahaz’s compact with Assyria: “The results were disastrous for Judah. The southern kingdom became a mere satellite nation, a vassal state, tributary to Tigleth Pileser’s Assyrian Empire” (47).

Hoshea succeeded Pekah in Israel, Shalmaneser became king of Assyria, and Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz in Judah. Shalmaneser began a military campaign against Israel (completed by his successor, Sargon II). Having conquered Israel (capital city, Samaria) in 722 B.C., those of these northern tribes were carried away into Assyria (2 Kin. 18:10-11). It was shortly before the desolation of Samaria that Micah’s prophecy was written (Mic. 1:6).

Sargon II, followed by his successor (Sennacherib) turned attention southward. Judah was invaded and its fenced cities taken (2 Kin. 18:13). Hezekiah bartered with him, agreeing to send more tribute. This heavy burden provided greedy landlords an excuse to oppress the poor (Mic. 2:1-2). Jerusalem was besieged, and undoubtedly would have fallen had it not been for the angel of the Lord smiting 185,000 (2 Kin. 19:35-36; Isa. 37:33-36).

Jack Lewis points out that Micah dealt with “a quartet of evil doers” (25-35):

1. Land-grabbers attempted to take from the poor, even driving women and children from their homes (Mic. 2:9).
2. Rulers hated good and loved the evil (Mic. 3:1-4).
3. The priests taught for hire (Mic. 3:11).
4. False prophets divined for money (Mic. 3:11).

Background of Micah 6:8

In the first five chapters, God's prophet has already shown the sins of Judah and the result—that they would be taken to Babylon (Mic. 4:10). However, this same verse promises: "There shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies." Earlier in this chapter the prophecy is given of the house of the Lord being established in the last days. Many nations shall come to it wanting to be taught God's ways and to walk in His paths. All this would result from God's law going forth from Zion—from Jerusalem (Mic. 4:1-2).

Now in chapter 6 the Lord presents His case against His wayward people. First, He asks them to testify of what He has done to them and in what way He has wearied them (Mic. 6:3). Second, He reminds them that He redeemed them from the slavery of Egypt (Mic. 6:4). Third, the Lord emphasizes what Balaam had answered to Balak from Shittim to Gilgal (Mic. 6:5).

Although some expositors use this to teach a good lesson: That all should speak only the words of God (as Balaam told Balak he would have to do; Num. 22:18; 24:13), the fact that his answer to Balak mentioned here was "from Shittim unto Gilgal" (Mic. 6:5) suggests another line of thought altogether. It was at Shittim that "the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab" (Num. 25:1). This was a result of the direct advice of Balaam to Balak! Revelation 2:14 speaks of "Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15), but had not been able to collect Balak's promised reward by cursing Israel because each time he intended to curse Israel God had turned his intended curse into a blessing. Evidently to still obtain Balak's wages, Balaam had advised Balak that he could still prevail over Israel by getting the daughters of Moab to entice the men of Israel to commit fornication. (Read Numbers 31:8, 16 for further information

on Balaam later being executed at God’s command for this very reason.)

What about “from Shittim unto **Gilgal**” in our text? What happened at Gilgal? It was here that Saul was made king as a result of Israel’s rejection of God as their King (1 Sam. 10:8-25). Gilgal became a symbol of Israel’s rebellion and idolatrous worship (see Hos. 4:15; 9:15). Why were they to remember what had occurred “from Shittim unto Gilgal”? Because these blatant examples of rebellion show that God is righteous in punishing His rebellious people, as He will shortly do in Babylon. Micah 6:5 concludes their need to remember the events “From Shittim unto Gilgal; **that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.**” (See a more thorough discussion of this idea by Burton Coffman 355-357.)

Fourth, in God’s case against His wayward people, is their suggestion that their many sacrifices should offset their ungodliness. Would God be appeased with “burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?... with thousands of rams,...with ten thousands of rivers of oil?... [or even with] the fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?” (Mic. 6:6-7)? God commanded many sacrifices, but even these were unacceptable when offered by those who were living a life of wickedness (also see Isa. 1:11-17). He never commanded the sacrifice of their children—such was an abomination to Him—although wicked Ahaz and others in Israel had followed this pagan practice (2 Kin. 16:3; 17:17).

What God Does Require (6:8)

God’s has shown His people **what is good**. This is another way of saying that God has revealed His will to man. It is interesting that “do justly, love kindness, walk humbly with thy God” is engraved on the wall of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. (Waddey 314). We now notice God’s three stated requirements:

Do Justly

God requires His people “to do justly.” Doing *justly* has to do with carefully keeping and applying God’s law to all situations. Habakkuk 2:4 states: “The just shall live by his faith.” The New Testament quotes this statement three times (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). In each of these, **living by faith** is equivalent to **living by what God has revealed**. Faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Rom. 10:17).

“Noah was a **just** man *and* perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). So, he did “according to all that God commanded him” (Gen. 6:22). John the Baptist was known as a **just** man (Mark 6:20), as also was Simeon (Luke 2:25). These were properly referred to as *just* because they revered, upheld, and lived by God’s Word. We are **just** when we stand firm for God’s Word, obeying it without partiality and without attempting to change it in any aspect.

Love Mercy

God requires His people “to love mercy.” *Mercy* involves compassion and kindness shown to others. One must love mercy if he expects to obtain mercy: “Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Mat. 5:7). We must not forget Christ’s parable of the unmerciful servant who had earlier been a recipient of his master’s forgiveness of debt. He was asked, “Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” He then delivered him to the tormenters. Christ’s application of this: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Mat. 18:23-35).

God said, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice” (Hos. 6:6). Jesus cited this twice to those criticizing Him for His compassion to sinners (Mat. 9:13; 12:7). This does not suggest any conflict between standing firm for God’s truth (or, justice) and mercy. Psalm 85:10 says, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other*.” However, one must not be stressed to the sacrifice of the other. Jesus told the Pharisees, “These ought ye to have done [with regard to their tithing even the herbs], and not to leave the other undone” referring to their omission of “judgment, mercy, and faith” (Mat. 23:23). We must never become so intense in stressing God’s law that we forget our need to treat others with the kindness and compassion that shows our love for both our God and our fellow man.

Walk Humbly With God

God requires His people “to walk humbly with thy God” (Mic. 6:8). To *walk humbly with God* is to approach God with a contrite heart, realizing our own unworthiness, and God’s holiness and majesty. The publican showed this attitude of heart when he said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus said he was justified because “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:13-14). “For thus saith the high and

lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15). The Lord later said, “But to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:2). “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17). “Every one *that is* proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD” (Pro. 16:5), as also are those showing haughtiness, arrogancy, and pride (Isa. 13:11).

WHAT GOD REQUIRES OF MAN— SOME ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

Both the Old and the New Testaments state God’s general requirements for man from two main viewpoints:

To All Mankind

God requires faith and obedience to all mankind. In the Old Testament we noticed this requirement from Solomon’s inspired conclusion in his search for the purpose of life: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man” (Ecc. 12:13). “Fear God” is equivalent to **believe God**. “Keep His commandments” is equivalent to **obey God**. Samuel expressed this need of believing and obeying God in these words: “**Fear the LORD**, and **serve him** in sincerity and in truth” (Jos. 24:14).

The New Testament states these same requirements for those who would be accepted by God. Peter said, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that **feareth him**, and **worketh righteousness**, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). The Gospel to be preached to every creature involves both faith and obedience: “He that **believeth** and **is baptized** shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

God’s People

God’s people are required to be faithful. We find this in three main areas: (1) **Reverence** toward God and His Word, (2) a **right relationship with others**, and (3) **control of self**.

Notice our text of Micah 7:8 and how it contains these three areas: (1) “To do justly” covers reverence toward God, (2) “to love mercy” covers a right relationship with others, and (3) “to walk humbly with

thy God” involves control of self. These three expressions properly applied covered all that God required of Old Testament Israel.

The New Testament gives Christians these same requirements in Titus 2:11-12. We are told that God’s grace teaches us to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” as we prepare for Christ’s glorious return. To live **soberly** is equivalent to the third requirement in Micah, “to walk humbly.” Living **righteously** involves our proper relationship with others covered by “to love mercy” in Micah. **Godly** living corresponds with “to walk justly,” which Micah uses to emphasize our obligation to honor God through living by His Word.

God’s specific requirements of man have changed from the Old to the New Testaments. But, the principles by which He provides blessings to man have remained the same.

On God’s side, He has always shown **grace** (undeserved favor), and that grace during both Testaments was extended to man by God’s revelation of His Word to man. When we read, “Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8), we immediately read the instructions God gave Noah as He revealed to him His Word (Gen. 6:14-21). In this Christian Age “the **grace** of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, **Teaching us**” (Tit. 2:11-12).

For man God has always required a **faith** that obeys His revealed Word. Hebrews 11 gives multiple examples of faith that pleased God throughout the Old Testament. Each one of these examples is characterized by prompt and complete obedience. Examples: “By **faith** Abel **offered**” (11:4); “by **faith** Noah...**prepared an ark**” (11:7); “by **faith** Abraham...**obeyed**” (11:8). God has never (in either testament) approved (accepted) a person until that person has shown his **faith** by his **obedience** to His revealed will!

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“HOW SHALL WE KNOW THE WORD WHICH THE LORD HATH NOT SPOKEN?” DEUTERONOMY 18:21

Randy L. Mabe



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INTRODUCTION

Many words are spoken in every generation and in every dispensation. Few of these are words of Truth. Only Truth will set one free from sin (John 8:31-32). Only Truth provides the bedrock in which the Christian's anchor of hope will surely hold. One thing is certain: "Thy word is Truth" (John 17:17). The Word of God is eternal Truth, which God communicated through men. Therein lies the problem. Not all men are trustworthy. Some men are deceitful and are found to be liars. How do we determine which words the Lord has not spoken?

NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2). In every dispensation God has given assurance as to the truth of His messengers. In the last days, men were cloaked with the powers of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles to confirm them to be men of God and their word to be the Word of God.

The preaching of Philip in Samaria will stand as a great example of this principle. Acts 8 tells of a great persecution that came upon the New Testament church at the hands of Saul. God was sending His Word throughout the world having started in Jerusalem and Judea. Now, it would go to Samaria and into the rest of the world. Philip took the Gospel to Samaria. A sorcerer by the name of Simon was already in Samaria and had the people bewitched into thinking that he was the great power of God. His trickery and slight of hand were smooth and practiced, and the people were deceived. Philip began to preach the Gospel of a risen Savior to a people that already had a champion. When Philip started to work miracles before the people, the people no longer were under the spell of Simon! They could see the difference between well-performed tricks and the work of God as they could distinguish the night from the day. They gave heed to the man of God as he spoke the Word of God and were baptized into Christ. Simon was among them! He is a great confirmation of the power that was in miracles to confirm the Word of God. He, as a professional, knew the distinct difference, and we do too. God's word was confirmed and now is preserved for all time by the power of God.

PROTECTED PROPHETS

In the days of old, God protected His prophets from death while putting to death the self-proclaimed prophets that spoke falsely.

And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require *it* of him. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deu. 18:19-22).

ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal is probably the best-known example of this principle. Elijah teaches a very important truth in the beginning of this contest. There is only one God and one truth. It was either Jehovah or Baal (1 Kin. 18:21). Elijah stood alone before four hundred fifty of the prophets of Baal. Remember that the contest was to determine who God is, and the number of prophets really had

nothing to do with that determination. From morning to evening the false prophets prayed, begged, and pleaded, but no fire came to consume the sacrifice. Elijah mocked and taunted them as they continued their fruitless process. He was not afraid of them because they were false and only worked under their own power. He stood with Jehovah God and worked under His power! When Elijah readied his sacrifice unto Jehovah, he had it drenched with much water. Then, after a prayer comprised of sixty-five words, Jehovah God answered with fire sent down from Heaven that consumed the sacrifice, the altar, the water, and the dust! God had manifested Himself for all to see. Elijah was confirmed as the prophet of God: the prophets of Baal had been proven false. Now they had to be put to death! Even though all the people had fallen on their faces and honored Jehovah as God, the false prophets were gathered together and slain at the brook Kidron.

MICAHIAH AND ZEDEKIAH

Micaiah was a great prophet of God. What made Micaiah great was that he remained true to his claim: “*As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak*” (2 Chr. 18:13). He was put to the test in the days of Jehoshaphat and Ahab, kings of Judah and Israel. Jehoshaphat had become rich and pierced himself through with arrows of sorrow by joining himself with King Ahab of Israel. Ahab requested that King Jehoshaphat join with him in battle against Ramoth-Gilead and fight as one. Israel had an evil king and evil prophets and Jehoshaphat enquired of them what he was to do. Four hundred prophets were gathered together out of Israel and they all spoke with one voice in the name of God saying, “Go up; for God will deliver *it* into the king’s hand” (2 Chr. 18:5). This picture is enthralling: two kings sitting on their thrones dressed in their royal robes with four hundred prophets coming before them in unity of message from God. One of these prophets, Zedekiah, even made a set of horns out of iron and proclaimed boldly: “Thus saith the LORD, With these thou shalt push Syria until they be consumed” (2 Chr. 18:10). A messenger had been sent to have Micaiah come and prophesy as well. Ahab hated Micaiah because he had never had a good word of prophecy for King Ahab! By the power of God Micaiah still was alive. The messenger told the prophet how the four hundred prophets were all saying the same thing and begged Micaiah to say the same thing also. When Micaiah stood before the kings he indeed did say the same thing! But there must have been quite a bit of

sarcasm in his voice because he was asked to say what God told him to say. He then told of the failure of the planned mission. Micaiah told how God had allowed an evil spirit to enter all the other prophets and speak lies to the kings. The reward for his true prophecy was a smack in the face and being cast into prison on a ration of bread and water! The result of the kings obeying the false prophets was defeat for Jehoshaphat and death for Ahab. What about the false prophets? Micaiah told the false prophet Zedekiah: “Behold, thou shalt see on that day when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself” (2 Chr. 18:24). Variant readings say “from chamber to chamber” or possibly “a chamber in a chamber.” Why would he be hiding except to try and save his life?

JEREMIAH

We can move about two hundred fifty years future across the sea of time and see that God maintains this principle concerning His prophets. Jeremiah was a true prophet of Jehovah. He worked among many false prophets. For a period of time the people would have to discern truth from the lies. Then they would see the false prophets put to death while Jeremiah was protected of Jehovah. The things they prophesied were lies and would not come to pass. The results of their teachings must be judged and not the first impressions of their speech. Being a good mixer and a smooth speaker are two earmarks of the false teacher (Rom. 16:18). How many preachers have been hired only on these two *qualifications*?

Jeremiah was chosen and commissioned by God to be His prophet. Jehovah promised Jeremiah protection.

But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:7-10).

And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city,

and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee (1:16-19).

This protection was needed during Jeremiah's career as a prophet. Jeremiah was the prophet to Judah in her last days before being taken into captivity and Jerusalem's destruction. He prophesied from the reign of Josiah to the fall of Judah. As a Jew and to the Jews he prophesied that Babylon would one day take them over. He further testified that Judah should not fight but give themselves into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Babylonians. He truly stated that the Jews would be in captivity in a foreign land for seventy years, and they should build houses there and eat of their own gardens. Judah could resolve this matter and not go into captivity if she would just repent. This should have been the part of Jeremiah's message that pricked the ears of Judah, but she just heard what she wanted and branded Jeremiah as a traitor and set out to kill him. His own countrymen and family were the first to devise a plan for his death. They would speak fair words to his face and try to kill him when his back was turned (11:18-23; 12:5-6). The priests and the false prophets were his chief enemies (26:7-8). Jeremiah was cast into a miry clay pit and into prison, but the Lord God delivered him as He promised. These events and his bold proclamation of the Word of God should have filled the ears of the people with a sweet sound. However, it was to them as a clanging cowbell in a concert. Yet, at the end of this time period, Jeremiah is taken from the prison of his countrymen by the foreign king Nebuchadnezzar and offered wealth and safety in the courts of Babylon for his work. Jeremiah's prophecies stood and were fulfilled without one word failing. The people should have feared him. He is honored of God, even to this day, having a book under his name in the sacred Scriptures preserved of God for the education of all mankind.

JEREMIAH AND HANANIAH

The false prophets did not fare so well in any category. Their greatest controversy is found in their words. The false prophet says, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying" (Jer. 28:2). While Jehovah God replies:

Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people

to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD (28:15-16).

Here is the sad story of Hananiah the false prophet. Jeremiah had prophesied that Judah would remain in Babylonian captivity for seventy years. This was depressing to the people's ears. Hananiah prophesied something smooth and comforting to the ears of the people. He said that God had broken the yoke of Babylon and that the captives and the temple treasures would return in two full years! Two years sounded much better in the ears of the people than seventy years. God had previously had Jeremiah build yokes and wear them and send them to the nations, teaching them that they would be in bondage to Babylon. Hananiah broke the wooden yoke off Jeremiah's neck in front of the people to *prove* that God had broken the yoke of Babylon. Jeremiah said "Amen" to this proclamation but added that it must first come to pass to be true. Immediately God communicated with Jeremiah that He had not spoken this word and that Jeremiah's prophecy was the true one. God said that Hananiah had traded a yoke of wood for a yoke of iron, having made it worse for the people. They would not have believed a lie had he not lied! Their hopes were lifted and then shattered. God said that Hananiah must die. Within two months of his first bold proclamation under the name of God he was dead (28:1, 16-17).

FALSE PROPHETS OF THE CAPTIVITY

Even among the captives in Babylon, false prophets told their pernicious lies. Jeremiah had prophesied that the captivity would be seventy years and the captives should settle into their own houses and be good citizens of Babylon until the appointed time of their return. Yet in Babylon among the captives, Ahab, the son of Koliah, and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah, were saying just the opposite. They were hanging their hopes, or dreams, upon the ones left behind in Judah to come and rescue them shortly. They were saying balmy words that would relieve the itching of the ears of the people. These words were lies that embitter the people in the end. God had these two men delivered to King Nebuchadnezzar. He slew these men in front of the Israelites and then had them roasted with fire (Jer. 29:21-22). Their reproach embittered the people to the point that these men's names became curse words. "Be ye like Ahab and Zedekiah" would be the curse pronounced upon a liar among the captives. How very different is the story of godly men under

the protection of God. A furnace stoked seven times hotter than normal could not even singe the garment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3:27)!

JEREMIAH AND SHEMAIAH

One day Zephaniah the priest read a letter to the prophet Jeremiah. This letter was from Shemaiah the Nehelamite, the dreamer. The letter had been sent to the priests and the people in Jerusalem under his own name telling what Jehovah had accomplished. He said that God had replaced the priest Jehoida with himself, giving him the authority to make decrees. His decree was that all the self-appointed prophets should be rebuked and put in stocks like Jeremiah who prophesied a long hard captivity for the people. Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, and he was to send a letter back to all the people in captivity denouncing Shemaiah as a false prophet. This letter also contained the death sentence for Shemaiah and his household. Shemaiah would die before the end of the captivity that he would not see any good thing the Lord was about to do. He would have no man among the people of his own seed. He would come to a humiliating end quickly. What a lesson the people learned again at his funeral!

Jeremiah was not a traitor though accused. Jeremiah surely did not prophesy through patriotism; he even prophesied the end of the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah prophesied by the word of Jehovah God; he simply told the people the words that God put into his mouth (Jer. 1:7-9). Without friend or fear of foe, Jeremiah faithfully spoke for God. His life was long and his testimony stands, while the false prophet vanished as a vapor.

FALSE PROPHETS OF TODAY

Today there are many false prophets among the people. How can we know what the Lord hath not spoken today? How can we know the false prophet that we not be afraid of him? By using the same principles that God set before the people in days gone by.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey

his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which *is* as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; *Namely*, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deu. 13:1-10).

In lieu of miracles to confirm the teacher and immediate death to take them out of the way, we have the completed, preserved true Word of God, the Bible. We are to study the Bible so we will be approved before God (2 Tim. 2:15). We are to study to know and understand what God has truly said. We are to judge every teacher by what God has said in the Bible (John 7:24). A false teacher is found when he departs from what is written. He may just be ignorant of the truth wherein he erred and may be taught more perfectly the way of God (Acts 18:25-28). You must teach him. The false teacher may be deceitful and a liar and must be dealt with differently. He must be marked by faithful brethren as unsound and untrustworthy that others desiring truth know to avoid him (Rom. 16:17-18). You must avoid him. Hobby riders spewing heresies must be admonished and rejected by faithful brethren so the innocent remain so in their studies (Tit. 3:9-11). You must reject him. Members in our congregations must be encouraged to faithfulness, leaving their false doctrines behind. They are to prove all things, cleaving to the approved, and abhorring the unauthorized (1 The. 5:21-22). Disorderly brethren are to be withdrawn from (2 The. 3:6). You must withdraw fellowship from them. Brethren living in sin must be handed over to Satan for the salvation of their souls (1 Cor. 5:4-5). You must hand him over. When these things are done properly

and publicly made known, it will be as though today's false teachers have been put to death concerning their influence. Their words will be impotent; their work will be small. The faithful teacher will be exalted by the Word of God spoken in the ears of people needing and wanting truth. May every obstinate false teacher die this death quickly.

The auditor must equip himself with the necessary tools to know the truth when it is presented and thus discern the false. One must study to gain a knowledge of what God has said (1 Tim. 2:4). Remember that truth harmonizes. Study the Bible when something new you are hearing contradicts known truth. Only error truly is in conflict with God's Word. One must exercise his senses, thus learning to distinguish between truth and error (Heb. 5:14). Study the list of sins in Galatians 5:19-21. See the similar qualities of sinful activities. Learn to recognize any of these qualities so you may discern activities that are "such like" (Gal. 5:21). Be familiar with the sound of truth so, when you are in its hearing, it sounds as clear as a bell in your mind. Know that God authorizes by direct statement, example, and implication. Become competent in discerning these avenues of authorization. Finally, commit yourself to only saying and doing whatever the Lord has authorized and only that (Col. 3:17).

ONLY DOCTRINES

False prophets today teach salvation by **faith only**. The Bible says that like Abraham a man is justified by the works of God and **not** by faith only (Jam. 2:24). False prophets among us proclaim by the Word of God that a man is saved by grace only, trying to appeal to the world. The Bible says that we are saved by grace through faith and that salvation is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). It is a warning signal to the Bible student when anyone attaches *only* to any condition of salvation. Salvation comes through a process that is made up of various conditions that God has set, and no man can erase. Jesus said to believe (John 8:24), confess (Mat. 10:32-33), repent (Luke 13:3, 5), be baptized (Mark 16:16), and to live faithfully no matter the cost (Rev. 2:10). *Only* attached to any one of these conditions would negate the others and make Jesus' words meaningless. Beware of this device of Satan and his prophets.

FALSE DOCTRINES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The false prophet of today has the Holy Spirit actively working directly upon the individual. He has become the virtual buddy to some

or the little angel sitting upon the shoulder of others. He is made to work upon some while not moving others at all. This doctrine is parallel in some ways to the doctrine of *Irresistible Grace* of the Calvinists. How many people despaired when no miraculous nudging came from God in a *religious experience* to confirm them to be the elect of God chosen from before the foundation of the world? Others have gone to condemnation, falsely believing they were saved because they fainted at work under the noonday sun one day out of many they worked under the same conditions. They believed God had directly communicated with them that they were saved and would later reject the Gospel upon these grounds. It was better felt than told. Where in all of God's Word is this taught? Rather we learn in the Bible that the gifts of the Holy Spirit that enabled the apostles and others in the first century in the infancy of the church have failed, ceased, and vanished away (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Yet, the same work can be done today because that which is perfect has come—the revealed Word of God. This Word came by the work of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit works through this Word. These words are the words of life because of the work of the Spirit of life. We are led by the Spirit as we follow the Word of the Spirit. The Spirit lives in us as His Word abides in us. The Bible says that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), that the Gospel is for all (Mat. 28:18-20), and that the Word of God is able to build you up and save your souls (Acts 20:32). The Holy Spirit's work today is great, but it is through the word of God He delivered and preserves.

FALSE DOCTRINES ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER

The false prophets of today teach that the Lord's Supper may be taken with God's approval on any day of the week. The Bible says that it is upon the first day of the week that the disciples met for this purpose under the approving eyes of the apostle Paul; thus this is approved (Acts 20:7). God gives His approval for Sunday, but there are no other days authorized. They stand in the silence of the Scriptures, not in what the Bible says. Some false prophets will partake of this memorial on the first day of the week—but only infrequently. By implication this same verse teaches that, whenever a "first day of the week" comes along, we are authorized to observe this memorial. If not, which first day of the week did Paul authorize in Troas? It is interesting that the same mistake is never made with collecting money in worship to God. One who neglects the Lord's Supper on every first day of the week is careful to

take up the collection every first day of the week when both commands are couched in the same authoritative language (1 Cor.16:1-2)!

FALSE DOCTRINES ABOUT WORSHIP

False prophets among us teach that all of life is worship. They remark that the most routine and crude necessities of life fall into some level of worship. It has been stated that according to 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are to pray even while we are asleep. The Bible makes a distinction in activities of life and worship to God. There is a distinction drawn in Abraham's day between the *going to worship* and the worship properly offered to God (Gen. 22:5). In our day the Bible makes a distinction between simply talking or thinking and praying. We are to pray with the understanding and in spirit and truth (1 Cor. 14:5; John 4:23). In other words, we are to expend effort from the inner man to learn and then apply the parameters of prayer as we utter words we understand to God who hears us, which implies the impossibility and absurdity of one praying while asleep. God never authorized such. We would not know of various levels of worship except for the false prophet. The false prophet has used the name of God in vain.

CONCLUSION

God's Word has a quality that stands above the claims of the false teachers. We must exercise our senses to discern between good and evil to be able to readily see it. Those who continually persist in rejecting Jehovah end up truly believing the lie and will perish. Consider the plight of a man of God who did not properly discern the evil of a false prophet. A young man had been told by God that he was to go and prophecy against the altar at Bethel. He was also told by God to not return home the way he went and not to stay to eat or drink. Another prophet, who was older met the young prophet and told him to come home with him and eat and drink. The young prophet remembered what God had told him and refused. The older man said that he also was a prophet and God had told him this message, but **he lied** unto him (1 Kin. 13:18). The young man made a fatal mistake by believing this older man. He was no prophet; he was a liar. How could the young prophet have known this? The answer is simple—He should do what God said and not what some man had said without proper evidence to prove he spoke for God. We have the same ability and responsibility today. The young prophet was torn of a lion (that was not hungry) because he failed to hold to God's Word and yielded to the word that

God had not spoken. We will surely spiritually die today if we follow his example. The Christian has nothing to fear from the false teacher. Their word is powerless in the face of the Word of God. Learn to hold it forth for all to see.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“HOW SHALL WE ORDER THE CHILD?” JUDGES 13:12

Bobby Liddell



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INTRODUCTION

Great Old Testament Questions, the theme of the 2003 Bellview Lectures, will, we trust, be an important study of lasting benefit to all men, and especially unto those of the household of faith. In our study of the question for this lecture (“How shall we order the child?”), we shall consider the Context, the Challenge, and the Consequences of the question. To understand just what Manoah asked, we reference several translations of Judges 13:12.

The King James Version states:

And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and *how* shall we do unto him?

The American Standard translates it thus:

And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass: what shall be the ordering of the child, and *how* shall we do unto him?

The New King James renders it:

Manoah said, “Now let Your words come *to pass*! What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?”

The New American Standard has:

And Manoah said, “Now when your words come *to pass*, what shall be the boy’s mode of life and his vocation?”

The Revised Standard Version has:

And Manoah said, “Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy’s manner of life, and what is he to do?”

The Contemporary English Version puts it this way:

Manoah then asked, “When your promise comes true, what rules must he obey and what shall be his work?”

Today’s English Version reads:

Then Manoah asked, “When your words come true, what must the boy do? What kind of a life must he lead?”

The New International Version has:

So Manoah asked him, “When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?”

The Jerusalem Bible has:

Manoah went on, “When you words are fulfilled, what is to be the boy’s rule of life? How must he behave?”

From these, the general idea of the question becomes apparent as an inquiry concerning what the parents should do, realizing the special nature of this child, to guide their son in the way he should go in accordance with the will of God. That they were determined to do all they could to be instrumental in correctly bending the twig from which the tree would grow is obvious. Thus, they were sincerely interested in knowing what course to follow, and in doing all they should to prepare him for the work which God had set before him.

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

The question: “How shall we order the child?” comes from Judges 13:12. Judges, beginning with the account of the death of Joshua and recording the lives and actions of thirteen of the fifteen judges until the death of Samson, has been called a book of failure. It is not God Who failed, but man. Judges reveals a dark time in Israel’s history when

God's chosen people faced gloom and despair as they reaped what they had sown in turning from God and His ways. The saddest part is this: it was their own fault, and they could have done so much better. The very last verse of the book states the reason for their deplorable conduct: "In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes" (21:25).

Repeatedly, the book exposes the cycle of their folly, beginning with their apostasy, followed by God allowing their enemies to oppress them, bringing about their repentance, and, after they cried out for help from the Father, God sending of a deliverer. Thus, their evil departures and subsequent descent into the depths of despair swirl through the blackness of this portion of their history beginning with the death of Joshua and his generation.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, *that* they returned, and corrupted *themselves* more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way (Jud. 2:8-19).

God's people, though they had entered the promised land, had failed to drive out all the inhabitants which God had commanded them to do (1:21-2:3). Even worse, they had compromised with the heathen inhabitants of the land, even adopting their idol worship. Their fear and faithlessness in failing to heed the commands of God would cost them dearly for generations to come (2:20-23).

Among the most formidable and persistent foes of the descendants of Jacob were the Philistines. They were neighbors of the tribe of Dan, dwelling in the portion of land bordering the Mediterranean Sea, and were noted for the five lordship cities of Philistia: Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron. It seems the Philistines had migrated from the Aegean and Crete to the southern coastal plain of Palestine (Crossan 158). Their importance and influence are indicated by the fact, as Pfeiffer states, that Palestine takes its name from "Philistine land" (25). The Philistines oppressed the nearby tribes of Israel, as the context of our question plainly shows. Especially, the tribe of Dan was distressed by their Philistine adversaries to the point they had not received (taken) all their inheritance, and some went north to the city of Laish which they captured and renamed Dan (Jud. 18:1ff).

Again, and for the last time in the book, God's Word declares that the people did evil; thus, God allowed the Philistines to oppress them for forty years (13:1). This was the seventh of the major oppressions during the times of the judges. In response to their subsequent pleas for help, God sent His angel (the Word, or pre-incarnate Christ), Whose name was secret (KJV) or wonderful (ASV—cf., Isa. 9:6), to communicate with the wife of Manoah (Jud. 13:3, 18). Manoah was of the tribe of the Danites, and was a man of Zorah (13:2), which Millar locates "on the western slope of the mountains of Judah, near to Eshtaol (Josh. xv. 33)" (469). Cundall writes that Zorah was:

a small town on the border between Dan and Judah, in the Shephelah about 14 miles due west of Jerusalem. It was on the northern side of the Sorek valley, immediately opposite the town of Beth-shemesh (156).

Although Manoah's wife was barren, the angel promised she would bear a son who would be a Nazarite from the womb, and who would deliver Israel from the Philistine oppression. Nazarite (KJV), or Nazirite (ASV) comes from the word *nazir*, which McClintock and Strong define as "to separate" (879), and which indicates a vow of devotion.

The root-meaning of the word in Heb as well as the various Gr trs indicates the Nazirite as “a consecrated one” or “a devotee.” In the circumstances of an ordinary vow, men consecrated some material possession, but the Nazirite consecrated himself or herself, and took a vow of separation and self-imposed discipline for the purpose of some special service, and the fact of the vow was indicated by special signs of abstinence (Christie 2124).

Thus, the angel instructed the wife of Manoaah concerning her conduct while bearing the child, in preparation for the child’s future work in delivering Israel.

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean *thing*: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Jud. 13:3-5).

What a great blessing bestowed by our loving, merciful God upon Mr. and Mrs. Manoaah! She was barren, and, as such, would feel humiliated among Jewish women. They thought they had to have children, and the more the better. Another Jewess, Hannah, who was also barren, was provoked and mocked by her *adversary*, Elkanah’s other wife, Peninnah. She prayed for a son, Samuel, whose name means “asked of God,” and whom she promised to give unto the Lord all the days of his life. Like Samson, Samuel would be a Nazarite.

And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And *as* he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? *am* not I better to thee than ten sons? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head (1 Sam. 1:4-11).

Hannah’s self-described affliction was because she was unable to bear a child, and this gave opportunity to Peninnah to taunt her. Sarai, wife of Abram, was also barren (Gen. 16). To them, God promised a child (Gen. 17). However, the fruit of their vain attempt in seeking to help God keep His promise presented a problem between Hagar, mother of Ishmael by Abraham, and Sarah, mother of Isaac by Abraham (Gen. 21:9-10). These examples show the concern evident with Hebrew women to be productive bearers of children.

No doubt, to be told by the angel of the Lord that Manoah’s wife would conceive and bear a son was the best news they possibly could receive. To the barren, a child would be born! Is there any wonder that the Holy Spirit revealed the blessings children bring as “an heritage of the Lord,” and as “arrows in the hand of a mighty man”?

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain. *It is* vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: *for* so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is* his reward. As arrows *are* in the hand of a mighty man; so *are* children of the youth. Happy *is* the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate (Psa. 127:1-5).

God planned the birth of Samson, the judge, prophesied of the work that Manoah’s son would do, and promised deliverance from the enemy through him. Judges were also known as deliverers (Jud. 3:9—KJV) or saviors (ASV). Little Samson entered the world as the chosen one through whom God would work, the savior of his people. He would be, as they are commonly listed, the thirteenth judge, and one who judged Israel for twenty years (Jud. 15:20). Some judges were warrior judges, like Gideon, and so was Samson. The inspired account of his life spans Judges 13-16.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE QUESTION

Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance *was* like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he *was*, neither told he me his name: But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean *thing*: for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death. Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of

God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband *was* not with her. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the *other* day. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, *Art* thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, *I am*. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and *how* shall we do unto him? (Jud. 13:6-12).

Manoah realized what some *parents* today seem not to know. Training children is primarily and ultimately the responsibility of **parents**. While the church, the school, and “Christian” colleges may help, they do not bear the responsibility as do parents. Rearing children is the God-given duty of parents. Though some would like to be relieved of the care required, and put their responsibility off on others, they sin in so doing, and the child suffers by their unnatural neglect of parental duty. Matthew Henry wrote, in comments on Judges 13:8-14:

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet, as Manoah, have believed.... Good men are more careful and desirous to know the duty to be done by them, than to know the events concerning them; for duty is ours, events are God’s.... God will... guide those by his counsel, who desire to know their duty, and apply to him to teach them.... Pious parents, especially, will beg Divine assistance.... The angel repeats the directions he had before given.... There is need of much care for the right ordering both of ourselves and our children, that we may be duly separate from the world, and living sacrifices to the Lord (204-205).

There must be instruction to order the child. Manoah’s question began with *how*. Parents need instruction—from someone who knows. Who knows better than God? Some have declared they wished children came with an instruction manual. This statement indicates two problems. First, it shows the almost universal ignorance of the fact that there is an instruction manual for rearing children. It is the Bible. Second, it also reveals the underlying problem that most people do not read instruction manuals anyway—except as a last resort. So, there is little wonder that most have neglected the greatest information for being good parents ever given: that is, the Word of God. If we want to know the *how*, we have to acquaint ourselves with the perfect prescription for parenting: the inspired Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Manoah went to the right source for help. He did not seek the advice of the Oprah, Dr. Spock, or Miss Cleo of his day. He did not go to those who had failed as parents to find out the *how* of ordering the child promised by God. He did not boast of his ability in child rearing,

though he had never had a child. Sometimes, parents act as if they know everything, and are too stubborn to listen to anyone, especially God. Especially aggravating are those who have never had children, but who can tell those who have exactly what to do and how, but with neither knowledge of the Scriptures nor practical experience. "Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born" (Jud. 13:8). Manoah sought his instruction from God.

Planned parenthood was the intent of Manoah and his wife—for they planned for the future and the proper parenting of their child. Planned parenthood (not the organization which supports abortion) is a necessity. Before the child was born, the parents were making plans. Planned parenthood requires proper priorities. Manoah and his wife were concerned about how to rear the child as God would have them to do. They were not seeking advice on how to make Samson a successful businessman. Nor were they concerned about grooming him for political office. Nor did they petition the Lord for information on how to prepare Samson for the best college. They were seeking the Lord's direction on how to train the child to do the work of the Lord. How the world and the church need parents with such correct priorities today!

There must be **intent** to order the child. The question Manoah asked was: "How shall **we** order the child?" He did not ask how Grandma and Grandpa should train the child. Nor did he ask what the government should do in funding child care to take the place of the parents in formulating the personality and attitudes of the child. Neither did he ask what the neighbors should do if he abdicated his position of responsibility. He and his wife wanted to do their best in fulfilling their duty, out of hearts filled with gratitude to the God who blessed them, in parenting the child. Thus, they sought help from God Who had promised the child to them.

Some parents are so busy climbing the corporate ladder, chasing elusive pleasure, pushing their children to be popular, worldly, materialistic over-achievers like themselves, and, generally, pursuing the fulfillment of worldly lusts, they do not even ask the question Manoah asked. Neither do they care to hear the answer, especially if the answer is from God.

Notice the father asked the question. Fathers are to be the heads of their homes, and, as such, have responsibility to train their children.

Some years ago, in the Memphis newspaper, a woman spoke of her seven sons (as this author recalls) who were all named Jimmy. The reporter asked about this unusual situation of seven same-named siblings to which the woman responded, "They all have different last names." There were seven sons born to the immoral woman by seven different fathers, none of whom was around. Not one of them was interested enough in his offspring, his duty, his soul, or the will of the Heavenly Father to take the time and put forth the effort required in training his child. For some, in modern society, child rearing is just a burden that cramps their profligate, wicked, worldly lifestyles. All need to know that fathers are required by law (God's law) to take their role in the proper upbringing of their children. For those who break the law, there will be sure and certain punishment. The law (Gal. 6:2) states:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

So important is the role of father in the home that God gave, through Moses, these no-nonsense commands for father and son by His divine direction. Note these commandments, statutes, and judgments were to be taught diligently everywhere and always. Likewise, when their sons asked the meaning of these things, their fathers were to be ready to give answer.

Now these *are* the commandments, the statutes, and the 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 mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and 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. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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. And it shall be, when the LORD

thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good *things*, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; *Then* beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you; (For the LORD thy God *is* a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted *him* in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do *that which is* right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken. *And* when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What *mean* the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as *it is* at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us (Deu. 6:1-25).

The question is, “How shall we **order** the child?” *Order* means, according to Wilson, a judgment or ordinance (297). Isaacs has the following as the meaning:

In the sense of regulation, we find “order” as a tr of *mishpat* (which is lit. “the ruling of a *shopet*, whether as a judicial decree or legislative act) in connection with the conduct of priests (1 Ch 6 32 [Heb 17] 2 Ch 30 16; cf Lk 1 8; 1 Esd 1 6), and with reference to the Nazirite regulations in the story of Samson (Jgs 13 12, RV “manner”) (2200).

God had set apart Samson from the womb to be a Nazarite (cf., Num. 6:1-21). Three distinct aspects of the Nazarite were mentioned in the angel's instructions to Samson's mother.

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou *art* barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink

not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean *thing*: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines (Jud. 13:3-5).

The example of Manoah and his wife shows that godly parents will seek direction from God, will seek help from God, will have ordered lives themselves, and will properly direct their children in ordered lives as well.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE QUESTION

There is no doubt that Manoah and his wife were parents whom God could trust to rear Samson in the right way. Of Abraham's trustworthiness, God said:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:19).

Like Zacharias and Elisabeth (who also was barren), Manoah and his wife were selected by God to bring into the world and to prepare for life a precious child. Zacharias and Elisabeth were noted for their righteous living and keeping God's commandments and ordinances.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the

disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:5-17).

The right conduct of Mr. and Mrs. Manoah was further emphasized by their thankfulness and hospitality as they sought to care for the Angel (Jud. 13:15-23). In keeping with their godly character, they sought to know from God what they should do in connection with this child. Notice, God heard and answered (1 Pet. 3:12). Godly parents will pray before they become parents. They will pray for the child, that he might be born healthy; for themselves, that they might be the parents they ought to be; and, for the future of the child, that somewhere other Christian parents are rearing a godly mate for him. In their prayer, they will pledge themselves to do all they can to bring the child up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Such prayers will be frequent and fervent, and will not end with the birth of the child. We need not expect an answer to be delivered by the Angel of the Lord, as in Manoah's case, but we can, with the full backing of Holy Writ, expect an answer from God. Nor, do we pray for God to operate miraculously, but we can, with all confidence in God's precious promises, expect God to operate through providence in answering our prayers (Jam. 5:16). The same God Who said, "Ask," also promised He would hear and answer (Mat. 7:7; Jam. 4:2).

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him (1 John 5:14-15).

While parents and prospective parents may make promises to God concerning their child, too often these promises are not kept. However, God is a keeper of promises (cf., Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:19) as evidenced by the fact that He kept His promise to Manoah.

And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol (Jud. 13:24-25).

Though parents may (and must) do their part faithfully, the truth is that children still have free will. A child may grow up and refuse his father's instruction (Pro. 1:8; 4:1; 13:1; et al.). No doubt, Manoah and his wife would have made different choices from those made by their grown son; however, he had reached the point in life where he was responsible for his own decisions (cf., Jud. 14:1-4). The question is:

“How shall we order the **child**?” Parents must keep in mind their role as the parents. Please notice that Manoah did not ask: “How shall the child order us?” Far too many are allowing their children to be the parents and to direct the home by their disobedience. As one said, concerning the discipline of children: “A pat on the back, placed low enough, hard enough, and often enough will do a world of good in training a child.” God promised Eli He would remove the priesthood from his house, and He did (1 Kin. 2:27), because Eli did not discipline his children. “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Sam. 3:13). Hopefully, later in life, when the child has left the home of his parents, he will conduct himself as he ought, and will be grateful for the proper training and restraining he received, but, sadly, this is not always the case (cf., Luke 15:11-32). Accountable children are responsible for their own sins.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Eze. 18:20).

Sadly, though Samson was strong physically, he repeatedly demonstrated his weakness for women. He waged a one-man war against the enemies of God’s people—mostly because of his stormy relationships with women. His obvious blindness to the wiles of the seductive Philistine women he pursued brought about his capture, binding, and blinding by the Philistines who then forced him to grind in the prison house (Jud. 16:21). His romantic experiences provided the impetus for his heroic exploits. His strength was obviously tied to his being a Nazarite for part of the Nazarite vow was that the hair should not be cut. When Samson divulged the secret of his strength to Delilah, she had his hair cut, and he lost his mighty power (Jud. 16:19-ff).

Keil and Delitzsch wrote:

In Samson the Nazarite, however, not only did the Lord design to set before His people a man towering above the fallen generation in heroic strength, through his firm faith in and confident reliance upon the gift of God committed to him, opening up before it the prospect of a renewal of its own strength, that by this type he might arouse such strength and ability as were still slumbering in the nation; but Samson was to exhibit to his age generally a picture on the one hand of the strength which the people of God might acquire to overcome their strongest foes through faithful submission to the Lord their God, and on the other hand the weakness into which they had sunk through

unfaithfulness to the covenant and intercourse with the heathen. And it is in this typical character of Samson and his deeds that we find the head and flower of the institution of judge in Israel (400-401).

There is importance in ordering the child. There are dire consequences if this is not done; however, there are blessed results if it is. Note the responsibility of the mother to keep herself pure according to the vow (Jud. 13:3-5). Mothers-to-be should keep tobacco, drugs, and alcohol out of their bodies, not only while pregnant but at all times. Civil laws require punishment for those mothers who by their impure physical lives harm their babies. Such inconsiderate, selfish actions can result in birth defects or even death for the child. Likewise, mothers should keep themselves pure spiritually if they would be proper parents fit to bring into this world a precious, little baby, to nourish him to manhood, and to help him to be ready to live now and eternally. Otherwise, they may cause him to be hampered in living for God, or even lead him in the way of spiritual death.

CONCLUSION

What a great example is Manoah and his wife! Dare any think God, Who created man and woman equipped for marriage and childbirth, has left no instruction for the proper conduct of the home and for the rearing of children within it? Thus, they sincerely sought instruction from God on how to serve Him faithfully as parents. Thus, Manoah asked the question, "How shall we order the child?" Though Samson was weak and, no doubt, disappointed his parents and God more than once, he was a judge and deliverer of his people. Samson was remembered by the inspired writer of Hebrews in what we call the "Hall of Fame of the Faithful" (Heb. 11:32). He, like Timothy owed much to his mother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15), and like Isaac owed much to his father. From *The Key Word*, bulletin of the Stage Road Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee, comes the following which should cause parents to stop and think about just how important it is to show the proper care and love for their children.

TO MY CHILD

Just for this morning, I am going to smile when I see your face and
laugh when I feel like crying.

Just for this morning, I will let you choose what you want to wear and
smile and say how perfect it is.

Just for this morning, I am going to step over the laundry and pick you
up and take you to the park to play.

Just for this morning, I will leave the dishes in the sink and let you teach me how to put that puzzle of yours together.

Just for this afternoon, I will unplug the telephone and keep the computer off and sit with you in the backyard and blow bubbles.

Just for this afternoon, I will not yell once, not even a tiny grumble when you scream and whine for the ice cream truck, and I will buy you one if he comes by.

Just for this afternoon, I won't worry about what you are going to be when you grow up, or second guess every decision I have made where you were concerned.

Just for this afternoon, I will let you help me bake cookies, and I won't stand over you trying to fix them.

Just for this afternoon, I will take us to McDonald's and buy us both a Happy Meal so you can have both toys.

Just for this evening, I will hold you in my arms and tell you a story about how you were born and how much I love you.

Just for this evening, I will let you splash in the tub and not get angry.

Just for this evening, I will let you stay up late while we sit on the porch and count the stars.

Just for this evening, I will snuggle beside you and miss my favorite TV show.

Just for this evening, when I run my fingers through your hair as you pray, I will simply be grateful that God has given me such a precious gift. I will think about the mothers and fathers who are searching for their missing children, the mothers and fathers who are visiting their children's graves instead of their bedrooms, and mothers and fathers who are in hospital rooms watching their children suffer, and screaming inside that they can't handle it anymore.

And when I kiss you goodnight, I will hold you a little tighter, a little longer. It is then that I will thank God for you, and ask Him for nothing, except one more day.

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“IS THERE NOT A CAUSE?”

1 SAMUEL 17:29

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INTRODUCTION

Saul and the men of Israel were sorely in need of one with courage and conviction to come to their rescue. A valley and a brook ran through the mountain and served to separate the Philistine armies from Israel's soldiers (1 Sam. 17:3). For forty days a “champion out of the camp of the Philistines” (Goliath stood over nine feet tall) taunted the army of Israel both morning and evening (17:4, 8-10). Saul and the soldiers who heard the words of the Philistine *champion* were “dismayed, and greatly afraid” (17:11).

David, keeper of his father's sheep (17:15), was ordered by his father to carry food to his brethren who were engaged in battle (17:17-18). David obeyed his father. As he visited with some of the men of Israel, Goliath appeared and made his daily taunt. Upon hearing the words of the Philistine warrior, David asks, “What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (17:26).

Eliab, David's older brother, grew angry and asks, “Why art thou come down? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle” (17:28). Eliab was wrong in his accusation against his brother, and David cuts to the heart

of the matter in saying, “What have I now done? Is there not a cause?” (17:29)?

Absolutely! A cause did indeed exist. David’s integrity and his loyalty to Jehovah would not let him sit idly by while the Philistine champion “defied the armies of the living God” (17:36). Even though Saul doubts the young shepherd’s ability to do battle with the Philistine warrior, David makes it clear that he is not trusting in his own physical strength. He thus declares, “Jehovah that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine” (17:37). David’s trust in God to provide the victory never waned as is evidenced when he said to his foe:

Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin: **but I come to thee in the name of Jehovah of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will Jehovah deliver thee into my hand;** and I will smite thee, and take thy head from off thee; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day unto the birds of the heavens, and to the wild beasts of the earth; **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that Jehovah saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is Jehovah’s, and he will give you into our hand....** So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David (17:45-47, 50).

The question David asked so long ago should be asked today by every faithful child of God, but especially it should be asked by every man that calls himself an elder or preacher in the Lord’s church. The answer is a resounding: “Yes, there is a cause!” In today’s society, the wind of “political correctness and cultural relevance” has swept away all desire to “*speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11—KJV) and “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3) in far too many churches of Christ throughout the world. An ever-growing number of brethren are infatuated with worldly sophistication and subjective concepts and have grown weary of objective truths. With so many traitors and turncoats to the cause of Christ ridiculing and mocking the church and upholding denominationalism, it is needful to hear again the words of the Savior. Christ forcefully states:

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

This stern warning is aimed squarely at those today who can still have their hearts pricked with the sword of the Spirit.

Many brethren are enamored with so-called Christian universities such as David Lipscomb University and Abilene Christian University, but these same brethren have little use for congregations of the Lord's church that respect and demand a "thus saith the Lord." It is obvious just how far brethren have drifted when man-made institutions command more respect and loyalty than the Lord's church. It is an absolute disgrace when brethren will fight *tooth and toenail* for the shrines of men but will not lift a hand to help or speak a word to support the cause of Christ! Is there not a cause? Absolutely, there is a cause!

Those who profess to be members of the church of Christ but unwaveringly support apostates like Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Joe Beam, Jeff Walling, Rick Atchley, and Lynn Anderson (to name only a few) need to publicly repent of their sins. These men (and others like them) have helped pave the way for the denominationalism that is sweeping through congregation after congregation of the Lord's people like a raging forest fire. Young men (and women) who have received Bible degrees from our well-known universities, while remaining ignorant of the Scriptures, rejoice in fanning the flames. When professors mock Bible miracles and spurn the inspiration of the Scriptures, it creates an environment that allows students to be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error" (Eph. 4:14). Is there not a cause when traitors from within do everything within their power to turn congregation after congregation of the Lord's people into a denomination? Absolutely, there is a cause!

Let us now study several areas in which there is a cause for faithful children of God to stand up and speak out.

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN THE BIBLE AND BIBLE AUTHORITY IS IGNORED AND SPURNED?

There is no substitute for the Bible. The majority of people today turn to men in search of the answers to the difficulties of life, but man cannot be counted upon for proper guidance and direction because "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23)! Jesus Christ is the only answer to a better tomorrow and a better life. It is the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, that gives one all of the information he needs regarding God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, worship, and

service within the kingdom. The apostle Paul affirms that the Bible is all-sufficient regarding one’s spiritual needs in saying:

Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

A Christian is obligated to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mat. 5:6). A failure to feed upon the Word of God will result in one growing malnourished and spiritually weak. Such a condition enables false teaching to take root and grow. This recipe for spiritual disaster is self-inflicted. Why is it that one who professes to be a member of the Lord’s church will come to Bible study without a Bible? Such an attitude is altogether different from the noble Bereans who “received the word with all readiness of the mind, **examining the Scriptures daily**, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Is there not a cause when so many who profess to be Christians fail to bring a Bible to Bible study?

The Bible is a tremendous blessing to those who believe and obey it. It is not unusual today to hear one who is a member of the church of Christ speak of his faith and desire to testify as to **how** he attained such faith. However, Bible faith—the only faith that matters—comes to everyone in the same way! The apostle Paul says, “So belief *cometh* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Thus, it is easily ascertained that Bible faith (or belief) comes from hearing the Word of God.

Biblical faith will **move** a person to action. It is as James stated, “Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from *thy* works, and I by my works will show thee *my* faith” (Jam. 2:18). It is impossible for one to **show** or **demonstrate** his faith without works! Yet, the majority of people in the religious world and far too many who profess to be Christians choose to believe that one is saved by “faith only,” even though the Bible forthrightly declares: “Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith” (Jam. 2:24). Is there not a cause for those who love the truth to expose the damnable doctrine of “faith only” so precious souls might not be led astray?

A basic and fundamental truth is that God is the Creator and man is the created. The created is **never** greater than the Creator! The prophet Isaiah observed that man was created to glorify God (Isa. 43:7). The apostle Paul admonishes, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or what-

soever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). It is impossible for one to reject Bible authority and glorify the Heavenly Father. An ever-growing number of people, however, prefer to do what **they** want to do in the religious realm, and they fully intend to have their way. This type of attitude spawns religious division and promotes denominationalism. It also produces liberalism and modernism within the Lord’s church.

The Bible standard for unity among Christians is clearly identified by the apostle Paul who says:

Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

All unscriptural religious division is the direct result of people refusing to abide by the authority of the Holy Scriptures (cf., Col. 3:17).

God’s law has been absolute and binding in every dispensation. Those in denominations and liberal members of the Lord’s church abhor the **principles** taught in the Old Testament regarding Bible authority. They have nothing but disdain for Bible examples that clearly show the wrath of God upon those who reject and spurn a “thus saith the Lord.”

Since God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34), it is evident that He communicated with both Cain and Abel regarding the offering they were to make to Him. God respects Abel’s offering, “but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect” (Gen. 4:4-5). Why? The writer of Hebrews reveals that Abel’s sacrifice was offered *by faith* (Heb. 11:4). The faith that God respects is a faith that **hears** and **does** what God would have one to do (Rom. 10:17). No man has ever been given permission to deviate from what God has specified! People who lived under the Patriarchal Dispensation were accountable for respecting the authority of God’s Word.

The Mosaic dispensation reveals to us the incident of Nadab and Abihu. These sons of Aaron “offered strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before Jehovah, and devoured them, and they died before Jehovah” (Lev. 10:1-2). There is no getting around the truth that Nadab and Abihu were killed because they took liberty to do that which God “**had not commanded them.**”

It should thus come as no surprise that God’s will and Bible authority is to be respected in the Christian age. It is in vain for one to acknowledge Christ as Lord but then refuse to respect the authority of His Word (Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46). It is amazing the number of people today who profess their belief in God but have absolutely no intention of following in the Master’s steps (1 Pet. 1:22).

All men have the obligation to not only hear the Word of God, but also to be “doers of the word” (Jam. 1:22). Regardless of what one thinks, he who refuses to abide “in the teaching of Christ” does not have the Father or the Son (2 John 9). Jesus teaches that the “wise man” who hears His Word, respects, and follows it is building upon the *rock*, but the “foolish man” who hears and ignores His Word is building upon the *sand*. It is said of the one’s house who refused to abide by a *thus saith the Lord*: “and great was the fall thereof” (Mat. 7:24-27).

The standard of authority that one is to abide by is not majority rule (Mat. 7:13-14; Exo. 23:2), the Pope of Roman Catholicism, or some charismatic and persuasive preacher. Christ is the head of His church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23), and He has been given **all** authority “in heaven and on earth” (Mat. 28:18). This leaves no authority for any board, council, synod, convention, or individual.

All people will be judged by the Word of God and not the word of man (John 12:48). The great battle that is being fought today is over the authority of the Holy Scriptures. Bible authority must be understood, taught, and put into practice if we are to please the Lord. Bible authority is not comforting for those who desire to worship as they please, but for those who love the Lord, is there not a cause to demand Bible teaching and preaching and insist that the authority of the Scriptures be respected?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN DENOMINATIONALISM IS EXALTED, THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IS IGNORED, AND MAN’S FELT NEEDS ARE EMPHASIZED?

The Lord’s church exists for the purpose of seeking and saving the lost. This is the reason the Son of man came to this earth (Luke 19:10). There is no man-made institution in existence (nor will there ever be) that can save man from his sins. The Lord has never needed the help of men in establishing His church (cf., Mat. 16:18); thus, religious bodies founded by men stand only in opposition to the one and **only** body that Christ has ever promised to save (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23).

Christ built His church as He desired it to be built (Mat. 16:18). The Lord only built **one** body (Eph. 4:4) of which He is the head (Col. 1:18). The Lord purchased His church with His blood (Acts 20:28). It is a Bible truth that “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Denominationalism has no God-given right to exist, and would not exist was it not for the fact that so many folks demand to worship as they please. All denominations have their annual conventions so they can “add to” and “take from” their creed books. They vote on whether or not to support abortion (cf., Pro. 6:16; Ecc. 11:5; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:41; 2:12; Rom. 13:9). They vote on whether or not to accept same-sex-marriages (cf., Gen. 2:2-25). They vote on whether or not they should condemn homosexuality (cf., Gen. 19:1-13; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9). Man-made religions “agree to disagree” and then convince themselves that they have attained biblical unity. Such a conclusion is absurd and could not be farther from the truth! Is it not amazing that denominations will strongly disagree with one another and then piously proclaim: “Attend the church of your choice.”

What is even more alarming than the existence of denominationalism is the fact that there are those from within the body of Christ who are making every effort to turn congregation after congregation of the Lord’s people into a denomination. Their chief concern is to be *politically correct*, fellowship **all** who profess belief in Jesus Christ, and denounce the New Testament pattern given for worship and Christian living. Brethren, is there not a cause when those who rebel against God seek to restructure the Lord’s church? Why will not more who profess to be soldiers of the cross rise in defiance of those whose goal it is to adulterate the precious body of Christ?

Is there not a cause when congregations continue to ignore spiritual matters while clamoring to appeal to every emotion of man and supply his every felt need? Brethren, the *social gospel* that is proclaimed in most pulpits and practiced by most congregations will not save one’s soul! Putt-putt golf, T-ball, baseball, softball, Six-Flags trips, ski trips, Easter egg hunts, and such like that *youth ministers* use Bible class time to plan and prepare for will not save one’s soul! Neither will souls be saved by all the social and recreational activities for young and old that occur in the “family life center” (outside the church known as a gymnasium) that was purchased with money that could have been used to preach and teach the glorious gospel! Brethren, is there not a cause

when members of the body of Christ are being convinced that games, fun, and frolicking in the sun will save souls? May we never sit idly and quietly while enemies of the Lord’s church actively seek to reduce the precious bride of Christ to denominational status!

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE LORD’S CHURCH IS IGNORED AND MOCKED?

It is a sad day when so many who profess to be members of the church of Christ are not impressed with the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church. Many have either forgotten, do not want to remember, or never were aware that the Lord promised to build His church (Mat. 16:18). Christ’s church had its beginning in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (A.D. 33) as prophesied by godly prophets (Isa. 2:2-3; Mic. 4:1-2). The untaught and apathetic child of God will likely embrace the liberal agenda to extend an open arm of fellowship to all who claim to believe in the Deity of Christ. Brethren who are not happy with the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church are eager to loose where God has not loosed (Mat. 16:19; 18:18). Their goal is to compromise and change to the point that churches of Christ cannot be distinguished from any denomination. This *blending* and *mixing* of religion is what they allege that the Lord had in mind for His followers.

The Bible speaks to those who will listen:

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

The **principle** contained in these verses is eternal—there can be **no fellowship** between righteousness and unrighteousness, between light and darkness, or the temple of God and idolatry. This is a call for God’s people to be **separate**, to be **unique**, and to be **distinct** from the world and all man-made religion that is in competition with and in opposition to the Lord’s church. Is there not a cause when so many who profess to be members of the church of Christ are ashamed and embarrassed at the distinctiveness of the precious body purchased by the shed blood of the Savior?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS IGNORED AND TOLERANCE IS HELD IN HIGH ESTEEM?

So many in our society have a flagrant disregard for discipline because the powers that be fail to administer it correctly and swiftly. This is the **only** reason that discipline (including the death penalty) is not the deterrent God intended it to be. Our nation will continue to deteriorate as long as righteous discipline is ignored. The lack of respect today for authority, human life, and Christianity is ample evidence of the price paid for spurning God and His wisdom.

Christians are to be different from the world, but so often what is popular and in vogue in society finds its way into the church of our Lord! This is precisely what has happened in many congregations today. It is, therefore, rare to find even the Lord's people practicing discipline regularly and consistently.

The Word of God demands the withdrawal of fellowship from a child of God who is living in sin but refuses to repent. Yes, contrary to what many now believe and teach, one can **live** in sin. The apostle Paul warns:

Put to death therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience: wherein ye also once walked, **when ye lived in these things** (Col. 3:5-7).

Such a chosen sinful lifestyle is terrible because the "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

Some claim not to be able to understand **why** the church would eventually withdraw fellowship from a brother or sister in Christ. The answer—it is the **right** and **loving** thing to do! When an effort to restore a brother or sister who has been overtaken by sin fails (Gal. 6:1), the "withdrawal of fellowship" is a continuation of that effort to try to bring such a one to his or her senses and save the soul (cf., 1 Cor. 5:5). The withdrawal of fellowship also serves to keep the church pure as a little bad leaven will contaminate the entire lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

Who should the church discipline? The Bible has the answer. First, **false teachers** are to be disciplined (Tit. 3:10). The *factious man* or *heretic* instead of contending "earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) will do all within his power to introduce into the Lord's church that for which there is no Bible authority. The "vain talkers and deceivers...mouths must be stopped" (Tit. 1:10-11).

Second, those who cause **unscriptural division** are to be marked (Rom. 16:17). Some contend that *marking* one is not a withdrawal of fellowship, but the Scripture says to “mark” and then “turn away from them.” Yes, such marking is a withdrawal of fellowship!

Third, the church must withdraw from those who **continue to practice worldly sins**. The apostle Paul makes it clear to the church at Corinth that they are not to *keep company* nor eat with any brother who is “a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner” (1 Cor. 5:11—KJV).

Fourth, church members who choose to **walk disorderly** are to be disciplined (2 The. 3:6). *Disorderly* is a term that is used of a soldier who breaks rank and is thus out of step. The context of this verse has to do with the sins of the idle person and the busybody. *Disorderly*, however, applies not only to the idle and the busybody but to **anyone** who is out of step with the Word of God!

Church discipline demands that social and fraternal fellowship be terminated with the brother that is *marked* or *withdrawn from*. One can, of course, have contact to seek the disciplined brother’s restoration. If practiced diligently and correctly, church discipline will gain respect for the Lord’s church, regain lost souls, and please the Heavenly Father.

Brethren, is there not a cause when church members insist on living in sin and therefore bring shame and reproach upon the precious body of Christ (cf., Eph. 5:27)? Is there not a cause when tolerance is preferred over church discipline?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN ELDERS ARE UNWILLING TO “FEED THE FLOCK” AND “TO CONVICT THE GAINSAYERS”?

Nothing is more crucial to the spiritual well-being of the church than having godly men serving as elders. If elders in the Lord’s church would take their scriptural task seriously, it would end the liberalism and immorality that runs rampant in many congregations. “Holding to the faithful word,” exhorting “in the sound doctrine,” and convicting “the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9) is not popular with the masses and thus is ignored by most elders.

The Holy Scriptures list three awesome responsibilities of godly elders. First, elders must be committed to **feeding the flock** (Acts 20:28). If an elder is negligent in feeding himself, he cannot be depended upon to see that the Lord’s church is fed! Elders should be

aware of what constitutes spiritual food. Paul told Timothy to “hold fast the form of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). Timothy was also instructed, “But abide thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14-15). The final charge of Paul to Timothy was to “preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim. 4:2). Brethren, “Andy of Mayberry” is powerless to save the souls of men, and godly elders will not allow such foolishness to occur under the guise of Bible study!

Second, godly elders are “able to **exhort in the sound doctrine**, and to **convict the gainsayers**” (Tit. 1:9). The qualification of an elder being “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2) that is often met with the retort “apt to teach anything” is no longer a laughing matter as it is often far too true! Bible preaching is no longer tolerated by the majority of brethren, and referencing numerous Scriptures is ridiculed by all of liberal persuasion. Bring on “Andy of Mayberry” and some who call themselves elders are *apt* to go for it!

Third, godly elders are to “**rule well**” (1 Tim. 5:17). They should be godly *examples* and will have no desire to lord it over the charge that is allotted to them (1 Pet. 5:3). Such does not, however, dispense with their God-given command to *rule* (Heb. 13:17) over the congregation and to “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). The decision that godly elders make will be in accordance with God’s Word and His will.

Brethren, is there not a cause when so many who profess to be elders are unwilling to be the shepherds and overseers that God intended them to be?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN SO MANY CONTEND THAT GOD’S WORD IS NOT EASILY UNDERSTOOD OR THAT ALL CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE ALIKE?

The Gospel is not complicated or difficult to understand. When Christ taught during His earthly ministry, “The common people heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37). Thus, even those who were poorer and less educated had no problem in understanding the Master’s message. Man has no right to preach or teach in such a way that leaves the listener wondering what was said. One’s mission in evangelization is not to impress with eloquence but to convert the soul. Multitudes of people

today are infatuated with men when they should be impressed with God.

The greatest sermon ever preached on earth is easily understood. The Lord’s teaching is simple, yet profound (Mat. 5-7). One who is truly seeking to learn of the Savior’s teaching will never go away in confusion and despair. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian brethren that he did not come to them “with excellency of speech or of wisdom” and that his speech and “preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1, 4).

Jesus teaches the people and then states, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 8:8). He even warns, “Take heed therefore how ye hear” (Luke 8:18). The teaching of Christ is to be heard and obeyed. One thus correctly infers that the teaching of Christ is easy for all to understand. To the Ephesian brethren Paul said, “Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). One can understand the Word of God because one can **know** God’s truth (John 8:32).

Neither is it true that the King James or American Standard versions of the Bible cannot be understood. It is amazing that folks studied from and understood these versions for years before the liberal, modernistic perversions such as the New International Version (or more properly, Perversion) arrived on the scene! It is an incredible indictment against God to charge that His revelation to man cannot be understood.

Can we all understand the Bible alike? Absolutely! Can all people understand that two plus two equals four? Can people throughout the world agree on the most complicated of mathematical formulas? Yes! Such is always a simple task if the proper standard is respected and honored. When the authority of Christ is honored (Mat. 28:18) and the truth is accepted that God’s Word “is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89), it will be amazing how quickly all will come to the same understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

Is there not a cause when most people say that truth cannot be understood, yet God declares that He “would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4)?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN SO MANY ADVOCATE THAT ONE CAN BE SAVED WHO WILL NOT REPENT?

One who desires to go to Heaven **must** repent of his sins (Luke 13:3). Yet, many have been erroneously taught that they can continue

to live in certain sins and God will accept them as they are. God will forgive one of any sin he might commit (1 John 1:7), but all sin must be turned from and practiced no more. The truth must be taught regarding repentance.

First, godly repentance is **not simply being sorry** for one's sin. The Bible teaches there is a right kind of sorrow and a wrong kind of sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9-10). Godly sorrow works or produces repentance because the person has a sincere desire to correct his sinful wrongdoing and live a life that pleases God. Worldly sorrow produces only spiritual death because the motivation (whatever it may be) is not to please God by conforming to His will.

Second, godly repentance is **not simply remorse** over being caught in a sinful act. One may be embarrassed and sorry for his family's sake that his sin is now known by the general public. He may also be sorry that he was not more careful so he would not be caught. This type of worldly sorrow, however, is not godly sorrow that leads to genuine repentance.

Third, godly repentance is **not simply making a change in the congregation that one attends**. Many brethren today when confronted because of their sinful actions (or when their sin becomes known) simply make the decision to change congregations. Why are brethren convinced that, because others do not know about their sins, those sins are forgiven? One may be successful in hiding his sins from his fellowman, but he cannot hide his sins from God (cf., Heb. 4:12-13).

Fourth, godly repentance is **not simply slipping back into the services** of the Lord's church. Sometimes brethren quit attending the services of the church and are out of duty for months or years before deciding to begin attending again. There is surely no more public and known sin than that of forsaking the assembly of the saints (Heb. 10:25).

One who is employed by some company does not walk away from his job one day only to return months or years later anticipating to resume his normal duties and to receive full salary while not saying one word about his absence. Why will one convince himself that standards for worldly organizations are **higher** than those standards for the Lord's church? One's confession needs to be as public as his sin if his repentance is genuine (cf., Jam. 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

What is godly repentance? First, godly repentance is **a change of mind about sin**. Sin is no longer viewed as a lighthearted matter but

rather something that is hated and abhorred by God. When one ceases attempting to justify his sinful action, he will see sin for what it is. Drunkenness (Gal. 5:19-21) will no longer be called a disease. How many diseases do you know of that people bottle and drink? One will no longer attempt to justify homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9-10) as an alternative lifestyle. Fornication (Gal. 5:19-21) will no longer be winked at as one *sowing his wild oats*. Adultery (1 Cor. 6:9-10) will no longer be given license under the umbrella of marriage.

Second, repentance **is a change of mind leading to a change in conduct**. It was Hosea who said, "They return, but not to *him that is on high*" (Hos. 7:16). One may return to some duties or engage in some external exercises, but if he does not truly repent and return to God, all else is in vain. John the baptizer teaches the people to "bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance" (Mat. 3:8). Jesus says that "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Mat. 7:20). The prodigal son is an outstanding example of one who truly repents. He extracts himself from the hog pen of sin and admits his sinful situation is his fault. He returns to his father and says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

Is there not a cause today when the majority are willing to tolerate sin instead of demanding that people repent of their sins?

IS THERE NOT A CAUSE WHEN PEOPLE TODAY ASK WHAT THE CHURCH CAN DO FOR THEM INSTEAD OF WHAT THEY CAN DO FOR THE CHURCH?

Preachers and elders today are often asked, "What programs do you have for my family and me?" One is sometimes tempted to give the answer that these folks desire by saying, "For the wife we have a 'hop till you drop' weight loss program, for the children we provide a youth minister that is programmed by the kids, and for the man of the house we have a twelve minute special class on how to be successful without spending too much time with the Bible."

It is tragic that so many are motivated only by their *felt needs*, and it is downright deplorable that some so-called elders and preachers do all within their power to contribute to the satisfaction of such people. The "what do you have to offer" syndrome has eaten away at the Lord's church like a dreaded cancer. Instead of treating this spiritual malady

with a strong biblical injection, many elders have allowed the *tares* (cf., Mat. 13:35) to be fertilized!

How unlike the spirit of Christ is the spirit that is manifested today by multitudes who profess to be Christians! Instead of seeking to glorify God for all He has done in their behalf, these seekers of *self* demand that they be served and catered to at every turn. The honor that belongs to the Savior is given to men. Brethren, such ought not to be!

When will people once again be taught to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28-33) when they become a child of God? Some brethren are not doing much of anything for the Lord. They want the **blessings** that come from the Lord, but they are content to let others work in the vineyard. They want to go to Heaven while serving the devil. They want members of the congregation to be concerned about them, but they are not concerned about members of the congregation.

Is there not a cause when brethren who should be mature enough to know better keep asking, “What does your congregation have to offer me?”

CONCLUSION

Brethren, is there not a cause when so many who claim to be soldiers of the cross are willing to lie down and let the enemy run over them? Is there not a cause when member after member of the Lord’s church sits passively while the precious body of Christ is under vicious attack? Is there not a cause when the precious Gospel is being adulterated and the preacher is praised for doing so? Is there not a cause when so little is thought of the Gospel plan of salvation that it is omitted after the Lord’s Day sermons?

As “David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone” (1 Sam. 17:50), may lovers of truth never grow weary in using the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17) to prevail over the false teachers who are enemies of the Lord’s church!

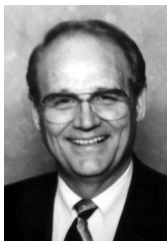
WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

“ART THOU HE THAT TROUBLETH ISRAEL?”

1 KINGS 18:17

Toney L. Smith



Toney L. Smith was born in Nashville, Arkansas, and raised in Texarkana, Texas. He preached for several years around the Texarkana area before entering Brown Trail School of Preaching, where he graduated in 1982. Toney has preached in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee. He is presently working with the Dresden Church of Christ in Dresden, Tennessee. Toney and his wife Debby have three sons.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages men have sought to blame others for their own faults, inadequacies, short-comings, and sins. It began with the first human beings upon the face of the earth. Adam and Eve violated God’s law, and each tried to blame someone else. Adam blamed Eve and God for “the woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” Eve countered with “the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:12-13). When things get “out of hand,” many simply want to point their fingers and stack the blame on someone else’s shoulders. When guilt and consequences come, most do not want to acknowledge the real source of their problems.

In 1 Kings 18:17 we read where king Ahab asked the prophet Elijah a question, which was really a finger-pointing blame. He asked: “*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*” The prophet of God responded: “I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.”

It will be the aim of our lesson to study the question posed by Ahab and the response made by Elijah. We will make applications and draw parallels to present-day situations in our lives, in the world, and in the church of our Lord. There is a great need today to study this section of

Scripture, because we need more men like Elijah and less who are like Ahab.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Ahab was the seventh king of Israel's Northern Kingdom. He ruled for about twenty-two years (874-853 B.C.) Although he may have enjoyed success as a political and military leader, he was a dismal failure spiritually (1 Kin. 16:30). He was an innovator in the area of pagan worship (16:31-33; 21:26), and he was morally bankrupt (21:26). His marriage to the evil Jezebel only carried him further into spiritual depravity (21:22-26).

Elijah, on the other hand was a man that was used to carrying out the will of God. We are introduced to him in 1 Kings 17:1, where we read, "Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead." This is all that we know about his lineage. He appears on the scene in this verse as he comes before the wicked Ahab and tells of a drought which would come upon Israel. Elijah was not a man seeking public approval, nor did he *beat around the bush* with his message. He did not try to sweeten his words or tone them down so he would not hurt Ahab's feelings. He simply relayed the message of God as it was given. Elijah is a great example of one who believed and obeyed the commandments of God. Elijah was a great man because he did not try to be great nor did he try to project his own thoughts and ideas. He was happy to allow God's Word to direct his steps and his voice (Psa. 119:11; Isa. 51:15-16; 55:8-9). It is clear that his actions pleased the Lord because he was later caught up into a whirlwind which carried him into heaven (2 Kin. 2:11).

The contrast between these two men is remarkable and clear. One was obedient to God, while the other acted in opposition to God's will. One was accused as being "he that troubleth Israel," when, in fact, it was the accuser who was the *troubler* of Israel. This has always been the case down through the portals of time, that when one is guilty of sin, he will seek to lay the blame on another. The world and even this good brotherhood have more than a few of their own Ahabs—men who by cowardice seek to hide their own sins by laying the blame at the feet of others.

THE CONTEXT OF 1 KINGS 18

Under the leadership of Ahab, Israel had gone deeper and deeper into a deplorable and an extremely wicked condition. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, who was king of the Zidonians. This

union was of no benefit to Ahab or to the people of God. He is described in 1 Kings 16:30-31 in this manner:

And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that *were* before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria.

His was a wicked rule.

It is in this deplorable condition that we are introduced to Elijah (1 Kin. 17:1). In this verse Elijah announces the coming curse upon the land. Through inspiration he declares that there would be no “dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” The drought came upon the land and would continue for three years. As the months and years passed without rain coming to nourish the earth, the inhabitants of the land suffered more and more. One can easily imagine how the heart and temperament of the people must have changed greatly. Of course the easiest thing to do would be to blame the messenger. Ahab would hold Elijah responsible for the lack of rain and the resulting consequences.

God instructs Elijah to flee from the face of the evil Ahab. So for the duration of the drought, Elijah stays away from the presence of Ahab. It is in the third year of the calamity that he is instructed to show himself unto Ahab, and to declare these words: “And I will send rain upon the earth” (1 Kin. 18:1). Notice that the famine had not brought Ahab to his knees; thus God will use Elijah further to prove the supremacy of His power and authority.

Verse 17 records the accusation made by Ahab. He refuses to confess that it is he and his predecessors who are the source of the problem.

Ahab thought to awe him into submission; but the prophet boldly and undisguisedly told the king that the national calamity was traceable to his own and his family’s patronage and practice of idolatry (Jamieson et al. 393).

So with much bravado Ahab asks, “*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*” What a pitiful, little mind it takes to blame another for one’s own sins, shortcomings, and weaknesses!

Elijah without hesitation answers the false accusation. He says, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim” (1 Kin. 18:18). The man of God did not duck his head and slip

quietly away. Rather, he boldly affirms that not only was Ahab guilty, his father's house was guilty as well. They had all forsaken God and His Word, and now the consequence of their apostasy was coming in the form of severe punishment. This punishment not only affected the immediate family of Ahab, it was being felt by the entire nation. There are times when punishment levied against one person is felt by many others. Take for instance the adultery of David in 2 Samuel 11. David and Bathsheba sinned together, but to cover the sin, Uriah died, some of the men in Uriah's company died, the new-born child died, and the house of David would be punished (11:17; 12:9-12). Misery would follow the house of David: "The sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (12:10). Sin is not a thing of isolation! Can you imagine the Bible recording David saying, "Well Nathan, art thou he that troubleth Uriah's house?" Of course we know that the messenger was not the problem, but the one who has broken the commandments of God.

Elijah did not rely on hearsay, but proved that he was not the troubler of Israel. He demonstrates that God is the only true God and that all the gods who had been adopted by Ahab and his followers were nothing but the figment of their imagination. He proposes a contest between himself "and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table" (1 Kin. 18:19). When Israel appears at Carmel, Elijah makes a powerful statement to them when he says: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (18:21). He wants to know how long Israel would go back and forth between Jehovah and the false gods. Clarke defines this statement as to mean: "How long hop ye about upon two boughs? This is a metaphor taken from birds hopping about from bough to bough, not knowing on which to settle" (457). The prophets of Baal prepared their sacrifice, placed it upon the altar, and begged for a fire to consume the offering. None came. Elijah prepared his sacrifice, placed it upon the altar, and called for water to be poured over the sacrifice. He then called for God to consume the offering to which God complied. "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench" (18:38). Jehovah had shown His

strength and might and in so doing had demonstrated who the true prophet was.

The summary of this contest is easy to understand. Who is the troubler? The one who is found lacking by the evidence which was presented. They could not dismiss the clear-cut evidences. Notice that they did not say: “You just made that up” or “That is not enough, we must have more proof.” They did not declare: “That is only your opinion,” nor did they say, “I will take Ahab’s word above the clear evidence.” Of course this would be an absurd and ignorant disposition of character. It would only demonstrate unwillingness to lay aside pride and arrogance for clear evidence of truth. We would do well to remember that evidence of the truth always identifies the laborer for God and the true “troubler of Israel.”

MODERN-DAY AHABS

The world is full of those who seek to blame others for their own sins or for the sins of those close to them. It happens often in the world of entertainment, politics, and business. For example, we hear many famous individuals who defend the character of those in the homosexual and lesbian community. They declare that it is simply an alternate lifestyle and is no one’s business except the individuals who are involved. What a lie! This filthy lifestyle has brought upon millions and millions the scourge of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). These liberal thinkers say that it is our fault that a cure has not been found. The continuance of AIDS is our fault, so they say, because we have not put enough money and interest into research for the cure. The cure will come when individuals abstain from the sinful acts that are proven to cause and spread the disease (Rom. 1:26-27). Who is the troubler of mankind: the homosexuals and the lesbians—or the ones who stand in opposition to such?

The political world would like to blame everyone for the failure of the leaders who involve themselves with sin. The cry went out against the media (and there are some things which we need to cry out against) when President Clinton was engaged in fornication. Many tried to blame the reporting of facts as being the source of the problem. Some in the business world will lie, cheat, steal, and cover up bad business through accounting frauds; and then blame the employees for what the management has done.

This author uses these illustrations only to show the absurdity of blaming others for our known sins and problems. These examples are clear and easily understood. Most would find some areas mentioned above with which they heartedly agree—especially when it involves someone else or at least someone with whom we do not agree.

This writer would also remiss if he did not also say the same is true in the body of Christ. There are many that “troubeleth Israel” on a day-to-day basis in the churches of Christ. The following observations are not made to point a finger at anyone, to ridicule, to malign anyone’s name, or to be unkind in any way; however, there are some very serious conditions which are present and are growing unchecked within the church. Let us ask: Just who is the “troubler of Israel” today?

The troubler of the church today is anyone who is a false teacher or anyone who will defend the false teacher. John warned that to fellowship a false teacher is to be guilty of those sins: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 10-11). The faithful child of God must “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 3) by opposing error as well as the teacher espousing that error. When we contend **for** the faith we will oppose those who are opposing the faith. *Contend* is defined as to “struggle for or to agonize over a given subject.” It means to make strong defense for the faith (Phi. 1:7, 17). Who is the troubler of the church? Is it the one who espouses error or the one who exposes and opposes the teacher of that error (1 Tim. 1:19-20)?

This scribe knows sound brethren who have been chastised for opposing the doctrine taught by Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Joe Beam, Steve Flatt, and others like them. When Shelly came out in support of the Billy Graham Crusade in Nashville, Tennessee, and many brethren opposed the Baptist preacher being there, who was the troubler of the church? Was it Mr. Shelly or was it all those who stood outside the stadium passing out literature opposing Baptist doctrine? Some of my faithful brethren were called troublemakers, but who was the real troubler of the church? When Max Lucado asked his radio audience to pray the sinner’s prayer to be saved, who was the troubler in the church: Mr. Lucado or those who spoke out against him? This author was asked to write an article reviewing Joe Beam’s Nashville Jubilee speech concerning the Holy Spirit (the tapes are in my files). Mr. Beam stated that the Spirit directed his actions in the home of a couple who

were having marital problems. His contention was that he had asked the Spirit to tell him when one or the other of the couple would lie. He said during the conversation he was able to stop either of them when they lied because he was informed by the Holy Spirit! In writing the article revealing exactly what Joe Beam had taught publicly, this scribe received letters accusing me of being a troublemaker. Friends, who troubled the church, Joe Beam or myself?

In a letter written by Steve Flatt on November 18, 2002, he gave the lame excuse as to why he would be on a task force “charged with determining how funds generated” by the Tennessee Lottery would be used. His letter stated in part:

Despite my preference, the state’s voters have indicated that they favor a lottery. If the lottery is approved, hundreds of thousands of dollars in public funds will be made available to Tennessee students who wish to earn a college or university education... While I find the source of these funds distasteful... the good that can be accomplished by helping young people attend independent colleges and universities in the state is paramount (Flatt’s letter).

It is strange to this author that Steve Flatt will involve himself in the lottery while the Salvation Army refuses to be associated with it at all! During 2002 the Salvation Army of Naples, Florida (a denomination), stood against the lottery by rejecting a \$100,000 contribution from a Naples man who won \$14.3 million in the state lottery. Which of these two, Steve Flatt or the Salvation Army, demonstrated their conviction concerning the lottery? The evidence is as clear as can be. Mr. Flatt’s action has caused trouble within the church.

The troubler of the church today is the coward who will not stand up and defend the truth. The troubler will also attack all those who are boldly defending the one faith (Eph. 4:5). Time and time again this author has seen men who have a reputation of being sound, but when faced with losing friends, popularity, or financial support, they have hidden in some corner and will not take a stand for that which is right. Friends, it is not enough to **say** what is right, it also requires coupling **action** with our words. Some had just rather not get involved and do not want their names mentioned. What a sad thing to have that kind of character and backbone. This scribe heard an older man say one time, “Jelly is to be put on toast and not to make up a backbone.” You know... he is as right as he could be! And there are times when this may not seem to be very important, but in matters of faith, there is nothing as important. At one time in the life of Peter he exhibited the wrong

kind of character and dedication (Mat. 26:69-75). But he regained his strength and stood for truth even in the face of death (Acts 5:18-29).

The troublers of the church today are those who will go against an eldership who has taken a scriptural stand against sinful practices and conditions. This includes all congregations who do not honor the withdrawal of fellowship from sinners. Some have for one reason or another taken the position that they are not required to observe the actions taken against sinners by an eldership of another congregation. These trouble the whole church because error can go unchecked from one place to another. Adulterers, backbiters, blasphemers, false accusers, those who sow discord, etc., can move into another congregation and eventually cause troubles there as well. If it is the case that one congregation does not need to observe the discipline already performed, what would be the purpose of marking the sinner? Some might say that it would be the responsibility of the present congregation to enact their own discipline. What if that person does not announce his sin? What if that person does not commit that sin after he has moved? Is he not still a sinner until he repents? Can the new congregation use that person (a sinner who has been withdrawn from) in public worship? The Bible says to “mark... and avoid” (Rom. 16:17), to “put away from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:13), and “from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim. 6:3-5). Who is the troubler? Is it those who have withdrawn fellowship or those who do not observe the withdrawal of fellowship from the sinner? When the church in Corinth withdrew from the sinner in Acts 5, would it have been proper for him to go down the road and be accepted into another congregation? Was Corinth the problem or was it the fornicator among them? And if the members at Corinth were not to fellowship the sinner, how could another congregation do so? The troubler of the church is one who allows sins to be overlooked.

The troublers in the church include those who murmur against the elders and sow discord. It seems as if it is becoming a popular thing to oppose and question the decisions made by elderships. Some have forgotten the command to

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

They are to *oversee* and *feed the flock* (Acts 20:28). They are to expedite the commandments of God, and it is a very serious matter to

oppose their God-given responsibilities (1 Tim. 5:19) Elders are to make decisions based upon truth. Sometimes, when these decisions are made, they are accused of causing a problem. The eldership under which this writer is presently working was faced with the problem of immodesty among some of the members. They made a public announcement concerning the Bible's position opposing immodesty. They included in their statement that the immodesty and dancing involved with cheerleading was sinful and would be opposed by the eldership. Those guilty of such left and were welcomed into other congregations in this county. It was stated that our elders were overstepping their bounds of authority and were only causing trouble. Who were the troublers of the church? Was it an eldership that stood with God, or was it in reality those who opposed a godly eldership? It would do a lot of good for many to study what is stated in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and Galatians 5:19-20.

The troublers of the church today are those who have become apathetic. They forsake the assembling of the saints. They just do not want to get involved in church work. Many of these will eventually stop attending services all together and often make excuses for their departure from the faith. They accuse the preacher of being too hard, the eldership of being too strict, and the concerned members as being too nosey. Usually they label the congregation as causing trouble with the community and with some of the other area congregations due to the strict stand taken in certain spiritual matters. This author knows of some folk who have left a sound congregation and gave their reason to others by saying, “They are just too strict over there.” This truly describes the ones who are troublers to the church.

THE NEED FOR MODERN-DAY ELIJAHS

One cannot be an Elijah when they have buried their heads in the sand nor when friendships have priority over truth. One cannot be an Elijah if, when truth is put before us, we decide not to get involved in someone else's problems.

Nathan is an Old Testament example of one who did not shirk from his God-given responsibility. When David had taken Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, Nathan came to David as God had instructed him to do. After the parable David was wroth and said the guilty man would be punished severely. Nathan answered by saying, “*Thou art* the man” (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Nathan addressed the king of Israel who had power

over life and death in a very clear and forceful manner. He did not make excuses for the king, he did not try to hide from his responsibility, nor did he soften the accusation. Nathan was not the troubler of Israel! David was the one who was guilty of this sin, and there were to be serious consequences. His actions hurt his own family, but Nathan said, "Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" (2 Sam. 12:14). Do not overlook the fact that his actions had given the enemies something to talk about!

One of the great examples of a New Testament Elijah was John the Baptist. His lifestyle was neither glamorous nor noteworthy by men's standards. His was a simple life wholly dedicated to being a servant of God. He asked for no fame or for his name to be remembered for centuries upon centuries to come. Yet he did become famous and renowned in the sight of God and all who seek to please God. Remember when he could have "kept his mouth shut" and thus escaped the wrath of Herodias (Mark 6:17-25). Was John the troubler or was it Herod and his sinful marriage?

The church today desperately is in need of men like Elijah. She needs men who are willing to speak out against error and apostasy when and wherever it might raise its ugly head. The church cannot continue to ignore sinful practices and men who seem to delight in being a troubler of the body of our Lord. May God bless us as we continue to stand for the right and oppose all who oppose the truth. This writer thanks God every day for elderships who are not afraid to guide congregations in the way of the Lord rather than to "test the waters" to see what will be popular. No one should want the church to diminish in size and influence. However, we should never change the church to make it grow in numbers and in popularity with the world. Remember we must never love the world (1 John 2:15-17) but always demonstrate our love for the church.

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“HOW LONG HALT YE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS?”

1 KINGS 18:21

Ronnie Hayes



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INTRODUCTION

The great theme of this lectureship, *Great Old Testament Questions*, is one that should merit great interest. Many of these questions are thought-provoking and should stir our interest to study these questions again. Let us turn our attention toward the question: “How long halt ye between two opinions?”

We are faced with choices or decisions every day of our life! This is nothing new. Man has always been faced with choices that would determine his destiny. In Exodus 32 Moses had come from receiving the law, only to find the children of God worshipping a golden calf. “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who *is* on the Lord’s side? *let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him” (32:26). At the end of Moses’ life, he makes an impassioned plea to the Israelites to choose life.

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, *and that ye shall not prolong your days*

upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, *and* that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he *is* thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deu. 30:15-20).

Joshua in his farewell address to the people said:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos. 24:15).

Christ emphasized the fact that we must make a choice: “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).

In 1 Kings 18 we have Elijah forcing a choice between a false god and the true and living God.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word (18:21).

It seems simple enough. If your so-called gods can do what you say they can do, then follow them. If God, the Creator of the universe can prove Himself, then follow Him. How they determined and settled this question is what we need to study.

THE CHARGE

As this test gets under way, Ahab meets Elijah and brings forth the charge. “And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kin. 18:17). Ahab says, “Elijah, you are the trouble maker!” Accusations are easy, but proving them is difficult.

Have you ever noticed that false charges against faithful brethren are abundant? Christ warned of those who would persecute Christians. “Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and **shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake**” (Mat. 5:11). Christ, speaking to His disciples, told them, “Ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake” (Mat. 10:22). Those who hate and despise Christians will not find it difficult to make false accusations

against them. During the great persecutions of the Roman Empire, it was not uncommon for false accusations to be made so Christians could be killed. In *Fox's Book of Martyrs* we read:

A variety of fabricated tales were, during this reign, composed in order to injure the Christians. Such was the infatuation of the pagans, that, if famine, pestilence, or earthquakes afflicted any of the Roman provinces, it was laid upon the Christians (6).

Peter said, “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet. 3:16). Let us look at the charge which was hurled at Elijah.

The first thing you can notice is that this charge was **false**! Ahab insinuates that Elijah is the one troubling Israel. “And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kin. 18:17). There is not a bit of truth in this statement. It is a smokescreen that false teachers use to cover their lies! They falsely accuse faithful Gospel preachers, teachers, and members of causing trouble saying that they are unloving, hardhearted, and narrowminded. They are accused of not “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). By the time the false teachers get through speaking, the cause of all the trouble in the church is because of good godly men and women! **Hog Wash!**

Was it Christ who caused the problem in John 6? Christ said some things that were classified as a *hard saying* (6:60). Was he unkind, unloving, hardhearted, or narrow-minded? How mean was our Lord when He said to the ones which remained, “Will ye also go away” (6:67). How unloving was Christ when he called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites (Mat. 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29), full of extortion and excess (23:25), whited sepulchers (23:27), serpents, and generation of vipers (23:33). Just as surely as the charge was false against Elijah, so is the charge false today when faithful Gospel preachers put some backbone in their sermons. Faithful Gospel preachers are not tearing down the church—It is the false teacher who wants to change the worship prescribed in God’s Word. It is the false teacher who wants to weaken the Gospel to a sickening suggestion and then point the finger of accusation at all who would point out their putrid proclamation and say, “There are the ones who are tearing up the church!”

A second thing you see with this charge is that it is **clarified**. Elijah did not allow Ahab to make this false statement without correcting him.

Elijah said, it is not me who is troubling Israel, but you. “And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim” (1 Kin. 18:18). Sometimes, as unpleasant as it is, those who are faithful have to point out these charlatans’ proclamations. Paul said, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). There is actually only one way to determine who is representing God. We must go to God’s Word to see who is telling the truth. The test to prove whether or not the prophet who claimed to be from God was, “Could he do what he said he could do?”

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deu. 18:20-22).

Oh, yes, there are many who claim to be from God and accuse faithful brethren of causing all of the trouble when they are not from God. It is God’s Word, which roots out these true *troublemakers*. God’s Word is truth (John 8:32; 17:17). It is not preaching the truth which causes the problems in the church, but those who would compromise the Truth (Gal. 3:1; 5:2-4). There are many who would have pointed to Paul and call him a troublemaker. Look at how he dealt with the problems in Galatia. He asked the question: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16). Is it not strange that so many are offended when they are told the Truth? Each one has to determine what he is going to do with the Truth. Is he going to accept it and obey? or will he reject it and accuse the proclaimer of being a troublemaker? Please do not be confused by all of the *smoke and mirrors*. Use God’s Word to verify the Truth (Acts 17:11).

Third, the charge is **defined**. Elijah makes certain the reason for the problem is understood. He said, “Ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim” (1 Kin. 18:18). Who is the troubler of Israel? It is the person who will forsake the commandments of God! Christ said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Have you ever noticed concerning those who want to *change* the church, when you point out their error on salvation, women’s role,

worship, or even the Holy Spirit, that their answer is: “You are unloving, unkind, hardhearted, or narrow-minded”? What is that all about? They are not answering their errors; they are questioning faithful brethren’s motives. This they cannot do unless they have all of sudden become able to read the minds and hearts of others. All they are really trying to do is to get someone to run down the proverbial *rabbit trail* and avoid the real problem. This author is thankful to Elijah for defining the real problem and the real troublemakers of Israel. Brethren, it is time for faithful brethren everywhere to deal with the real problems.

THE CALL FOR A DECISION

After the charge has been made and now clarified, Elijah calls for the people to make the proper decision.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word (1 Kin. 18:21).

How difficult could this be? If Jehovah is God, then follow Him, but if Baal is God, then follow him. This calls for a proper decision, but proper decisions will not be made unless some guidelines are followed.

First, if you are going to make the proper decision you must have the proper mind. The Bereans were able to make the proper choice because of their *readiness of mind* (Acts 17:11). Unless we have the proper mind set, we will never reach the proper decision. There are some who will never reach the proper decision because of their prejudice. Webster defines *prejudice* as: “preconceived judgment or opinion: an opinion or leaning adverse to anything without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge” (907). You can see this attitude expressed against Christ.

And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing *him* were astonished, saying, From whence hath this *man* these things? and what wisdom *is* this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house (Mark 6:2-4).

Nathanael expressed the same attitude when he asked: “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). It is just wrong for

anyone to judge a man by the color of his skin, his height, his nationality, or even his weight! It is equally wrong for anyone to dismiss a teaching just because they do not like the one who is teaching it. We are to examine the teaching to see if it is so. John wrote:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

It is good for our thinking to be challenged. Why, you might ask? James put it best: “Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jam. 1:3). When our faith is tested and we come out on the other side with our faith intact, we come out with a stronger faith.

Instead of having a mind blocked by prejudice, you must have a mind prepared to weigh the evidence and to make a rational decision accordingly. The Bereans, with readiness of mind, searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11). Now, one can allow his preconceived ideas to keep him from the truth or he can lay these things aside to seek the truth. Which will it be?

Next, if you are going to make the proper decision you must have the proper knowledge. Without knowledge the proper decision is rarely ever reached. Speaking of the Israelites, Paul said:

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2-3).

How would anyone be expected to make the proper decision without knowledge? Solomon penned these words:

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding (Pro. 2:3-6).

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding (3:13).

Get wisdom, get understanding: forget *it* not; neither decline from the words of my mouth (4:5).

The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness (15:14).

Buy the truth, and sell *it* not; *also* wisdom, and instruction, and understanding (23:23).

If you are to make the proper decision through knowledge, then that gives us a responsibility to learn. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter also points to the Christians responsibility to learn, when he said:

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

If anyone wants to know what God has said on any subject, he will have to obtain the knowledge from the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Finally, if you are going to make the proper decision, it will require you to have the necessary courage. You have now opened your mind, and you have searched the Scriptures for the proper knowledge. Will you have the courage to do what God requires of you? There have been many courageous men and women in the Bible. Each, who weighed the evidence, obtained the knowledge, and then made a conscious choice to stand with God. Joseph, who was sold by his brothers (Gen. 37:27) into Egyptian bondage, was faced with temptation in Genesis 39. Joseph knew the truth. What does he do? He refuses to sin (39:9). The fact that he was away from home did not change the truth. Even being faced with the possibility of imprisonment did not cause him to forget his teachings. We need more like Joseph with the courage to do right no matter the consequences. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were faced with a fiery furnace, their knowledge of God gave them the courage to make the right choice.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

Sometimes our courage is heightened by knowledge. When Peter and the other apostles were brought before the council and high priest and asked: “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (Acts 5:28). Peter, who

had faltered earlier (Mat. 26:69-75), now because of his knowledge of the truth (Acts 2), is emboldened to say: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). May we all through an open mind glean the knowledge of God’s Word and then, never let it go! Elijah asked, “How long halt ye between two opinions” (1 Kin. 18:21), so we too need to answer the question toward God.

THE CHALLENGE: MAN’S WAY OR GOD’S WAY

Some call it the “Elijah Test” and others refer to it as “Elijah’s Challenge,” but whatever you call it, the truth is going to be determined. There are many interesting aspects of this test that we need to discuss.

The test was issued by the man of God.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word (1 Kin. 18:21).

Have you ever heard one of these so-called *Miracle Workers*, when challenged to prove to do what they say they can do, answer: “I am not interested in any Elijah Test”? Why would anyone interested in the Truth, not be interested in proving what they are saying or doing? We are taught as Christians to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 The. 5:21). John records, “Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Paul told the churches at Galatia:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

It is our responsibility as a Christian to make sure the things we are doing is what God wants us to do. It is not a defense to keep us out of hell if we can say: “Well, he deceived us.” We better demand a test! We better demand a “Thus saith the Lord” (1 Pet. 4:11).

The test pits God’s way versus man’s way. Elijah encourages the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves to offer unto their god a sacrifice. Elijah does not place any limitations upon this sacrifice. He does not tell these false prophets there is a correct way to offer a

sacrifice. He allows them to do their *own thing* so the way of God and the way of man is clearly seen.

The test was simple. Choose your own sacrifice, prepare it, then call upon your god or God to send fire to accept the sacrifice (1 Kin. 18:25). All would know who was God by which one accepted the sacrifice. The false prophets accepted the test, offered the sacrifice, and began to call upon Baal to send the fire. They pleaded with him from “morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us” (18:26). There was no answer! Then Elijah began to mock and said, “Cry aloud: for he *is* a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, *or* peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (18:27). Then the false prophets began to cut themselves and still their god was as silent as a lamb (18:28). All of this and no answer!

Now it is time for Elijah. The first thing Elijah does is to repair the altar of God. Elijah knew that the children of Israel had “forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword” (19:10). Elijah is going to return this sacrifice to the way that God has prescribed. He takes the twelve stones “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob” (18:31) and builds the altar. James Smith said, “This act was both a protest against the schism and a reminder that the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom had no exclusive rights to the God-given name ‘Israel’” (381). He then makes a trench around this altar “as great as would contain two measures of seed” (18:32). Smith says of this trench that it was as “deep as the grain measure containing two *seahs* of seed (v. 32). The *seah* was a third of an *ephah* which was slightly larger than a bushel” (381).

There is a purpose for this trench. Water is to be poured over the sacrifice. They were to fill four barrels of water and to pour it over the sacrifice. This was repeated two more times for a grand total of twelve barrels of water. There was so much water that it was said, “The water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water” (18:35). The pouring of the water was not for show or dramatics but to prove that there was no trickery going on. Adam Clarke stated, “This was done to prevent any kind of suspicion that there was *fire concealed under the altar*” (459). Evidently, it was the practice of some of these false prophets to tunnel wholes through the altars and conceal fires under the altars to give the appearance of a miracle. A good drenching would solve this trick.

Then Elijah calls for the Lord to prove himself. “Hear me, **O Lord**, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the Lord God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again” (18:37). Why was God to rain down this fire? So that the people could know. This is not fake. The so-called *faith* healers (actually fake healers) of our days will not accept these challenges because they **know**. As one told this writer one day: “You are asking me to do something that is impossible.” This author knew it was impossible for him, but all know that God was able to do miracles! He made the blind to see, the lame to walk, stilled the storm, and even raised the dead. The apostle John reveals why He did:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

Elijah called for God to accept the sacrifice and “Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench” (1 Kin. 18:38). There was no doubt about this miracle and it produced the desired results. “And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he *is* the God; the Lord, he *is* the God” (18:39).

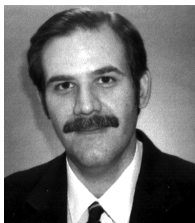
Many are wondering around today looking for proof. Open your Bible and find it (John 20:30-31). Our faith is based on evidence. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). The question still remains, “How long are you going to be torn between two opinions?” If Jehovah is God, then follow Him! There truly is no other way (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Jer. 10:23; Pro. 14:12).

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“WHAT HAVE THEY SEEN IN THINE HOUSE?” 2 KINGS 20:15

Tim Smith



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INTRODUCTION

What have they seen in thine house? This is a pertinent question in all ages and nations. We often see focus directed to the governments of the world, to the institutions of society in general, and to the religious institutions of the day; we even see numbers and statistics reflecting the alarming rate of sexual immorality as it demonstrates itself in sexually transmitted diseases and broken homes. What we see too little of, however, is focus on what the home is supposed to be if it is to succeed. While there have been many good and godly men who have addressed this timeless topic through the years, we would offer the following points in an effort to help people who wish to form a successful and happy home to realize their aspirations.

The question comes from 2 Kings 20 and, with its immediate context, reads as follows:

At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All *the things* that *are* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good *is* the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, *Is it not good*, if peace and truth be in my days? And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Hezekiah slept with his fathers: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead (vv. 12-21).

In the original context, the earthly leader of God's people had revealed too much of his goods and stood in danger of losing all. In our application of the question we must take it from this original setting and apply it a little differently.

WHAT HAVE *THEY* SEEN IN THINE HOUSE?

Who are the *they* in our study? *They* are the non-Christian world, the church, and even our children. The things we do in life, we do before all of these people. What they see in us, therefore, they may rightly take to be the expression of our convictions—whether they in fact are or are not. We may judge ourselves lightly, but others are not prone to do so. When our neighbors (who are not members of the Lord's church) see us engaging in the activities that fill the hours of our lives, they will draw the conclusions warranted by the actions. When our brethren see us living our lives, they will draw the conclusions warranted by our actions. When our children see us doing the things we do they also will draw the conclusions warranted by our actions.

In the case of non-Christians, they are watching to see whether our actions agree with our preaching. We will have little success (if any at all) convincing them of the truthfulness of the plan of salvation if they see us doing things that are condemned by other portions of the Bible. Not only will we fail to convert them, we will be guilty of giving them

ammunition to use against the Lord’s church in our quest to convert other people.

In the case of our brethren in Christ, they are looking to us for companionship and (in many cases) leadership. If they see us engaging in activities that violate the Scriptures they will most likely do one of two things: (1) Follow us in our sin; or (2) Lose respect for us. Either way, the result is unacceptable.

In the case of our children and other young people, they are looking to us to teach them how to live—quite literally. All too often we have seen children mirror the attendance patterns established by their parents. How many fathers who forsake the assembly rear sons and daughters who will do the same? Most! I understand that not all children follow the sinful paths of their parents, but I also understand that far more do than do not. How many alcoholics rear children who become alcoholics?

WHAT HAVE THEY *SEEN* IN THINE HOUSE?

As for *seeing* things in our houses, we should note that these things do not have to be witnessed by the eyes to be *seen*. They can hear what we do, they can see the after-effects of our actions, they can sometimes witness us “the morning after” and determine to an acceptable degree of certainty that our actions are not what they should be.

WHAT HAVE THEY SEEN IN *THINE* HOUSE?

By *thine house* we mean, for the purpose of the article before us now: (1) the actions, beliefs and professions of a given family, and (2) the actions, beliefs, and professions of a congregation of God’s children in a given community.

SOME OF THE THINGS THEY SHOULD SEE IN THE HOUSE

Regular Bible Study

People should be able to see in our house the practice of studying regularly the Word of God. The study of the Bible has, for some reason, fallen out of favor in many families today. In many congregations people do not study their Bibles either. There is no way that we can be a family of faith or a church of faith apart from studying the Word. “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Note that the Hebrews writer did not

say that it would be very difficult to please God without faith, but that it is impossible. The question of whence cometh faith, then, becomes of the greatest import. Paul answers it for us as follows: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We are also familiar with the aged apostle’s instruction to the young evangelist concerning fitting himself to properly handle the Word: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [handling aright—ASV] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Peter stressed the need for preparedness and familiarity with the word in his first letter: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

There was a time when men and women who were identified as members of the Lord’s Church were known (rightly) as walking, talking Bibles; in most instances that is no longer the case. Many do not know even what they did to become Christians. Many cannot give the five items of worship. Many cannot intelligently discuss the work of the church. Why? There was a time when these things were fully known by all of the members of the church. Are they no longer important? Are they no longer relevant? In some cases *our* preachers no longer preach on them, but they are still relevant and important. We need to be well-read enough in the Scriptures to intelligently discuss them and even defend the truth against opponents. Churches need to stress the importance of studying the Bible, and so do parents and grandparents. Have they seen Bible study in our house?

Moral Purity

People should be able to see moral purity in our house. This means that we should, as parents, enforce godly principles as the rule of the house. No faithful Christian parent will allow his/her son/daughter to dress immodestly.

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection (1 Tim. 2:8-10).

No faithful Christian parent will allow his/her son/daughter to attend functions that violate the teachings of the Scriptures (i.e., dances and

other *parties* of like nature). The Christian home will be guided and governed by the principle of avoiding 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).

No faithful Christian parent will allow his/her son/daughter to support things that are in violation of the Scriptures (such as we see in many who give themselves over as pawns to abortion groups and their supporters—the United Way being in that number; the *Salvation Army*; other religious and pseudo-charitable organizations). John warned about those in the body of Christ who deviated from His doctrine, but the principle holds true for all:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The Bible still charges the parent with the responsibility of teaching the child and administering discipline.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

Too often we see parents throw their hands up in despair and give their duty as a parent into the hands of the one to whom they should be a parent. Too often we see churches doing nothing—either by way of teaching or discipline—to stem the tide of immorality plaguing our homes and society today. We have a perfect example in Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians about the importance of the reaction of God’s children to the sin of immorality when it occurs in the home of a member:

It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit,

have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (1 Cor. 5:1-15).

The world watches—what have they seen with regard to our morals?

Supporting Good Works

People should see us supporting good works. They should be able to look at our attendance-to-the-assemblies-of-the-church record and without doubt know thereby that we believe in and wholly support the body of Christ and its work. They should be able to see us making our way to every Bible class, worship assembly, Vacation Bible School, and Gospel meeting. Our Lord charged: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). We should allow them to see papers published by sound brethren on our coffee tables. They should even see tracts and other such material when they come to visit. In our congregations many of these same things (so far as written material) should be found also. What is in our tract rack? What kind of Bible class material do we use? Is it sound? Is it actually teaching something—after all, not everything sold in “*a church of Christ bookstore*” is actually worthy of being used in our classes or displayed in our tract racks. Have they seen us supporting sound materials?

WHAT, THEN, SHOULD *NOT* BE SEEN IN OUR HOUSE?

Fornication

They should not see us carrying on *extra-marital affairs*, in the language of the politically correct media. The biblical word for *extra-marital affair* is fornication. Fornication should never be named among the people of God, but it all too often is. How many homes have been wrecked by this sin? How many children have suffered because of the uncontrolled lust of one or both parents? We simply do not know. Paul gave the authoritative word on the matter in the long ago, and it still applies today:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Adultery

They should not see us living in adultery. On this matter our Lord said:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery (Mat. 5:31-32).

Put slightly another way (and with the context) He further said:

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 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. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (Mat. 19:3-9).

The rule is: One man for one woman for life. The Lord set the rule, and He alone may remove it—and there is no indication that He will.

That Which Falls Short Or Goes Beyond What Pleases God

In short, there should be nothing in our house that in any way falls short of or goes beyond that which pleases God. Men ought to be able to look into our homes and see in them the pattern set forth by the Lord and His Apostles. May God help us to have the kind of homes that promote and advance the work our Lord gave us to do.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“SHOULD SUCH A MAN AS I FLEE?”

NEHEMIAH 6:11

Tom Wacaster



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INTRODUCTION

The text for this study is Nehemiah 6:1-11:

Now it came to pass, when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and to Geshem the Arabian, and unto the rest of our enemies, that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though even unto that time I had not set up the doors in the gates;) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in *one of* the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? And they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand, wherein was written, It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel; for which cause thou art building the wall: and thou wouldest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. For they all would have made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. But now, *O God*, strengthen thou my hands. And I went unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabel, who was

shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

The words of Nehemiah that serve as a title for this lesson are most remarkable. They manifest courage, determination, and a love for God above all that might be acquired on this earthly sojourn. But the statement is even more remarkable when we consider the background and context, both immediate and remote. Israel was in Babylonian captivity. A small remnant remained in Judah (more specifically in Jerusalem). The city lay in ruins. The walls were broken down, and the gates burned with fire. The lives of those who dwelt in the once proud city were in disarray. Brother had sold brother into slavery. Usury was being practiced. The Jews had inter-married, and their children spoke the language of Ashdod. Several hundred miles to the east, Nehemiah, a faithful and godly Israelite, found himself in the position of being the king's cupbearer, living in Shushan the palace. No doubt his life was somewhat easier compared to the status of many of his fellow countrymen. In the twentieth year of Babylonian captivity Nehemiah received a report concerning the situation in Jerusalem: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3).

The report was so heart-rending that he "sat down and wept" (1:4). His countenance became downcast, so much so that the king asked, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart" (2:2). While life for the child of God should be one of joy and happiness, there are occasions when our hearts should break. Dear reader, has the pitiful condition of the Lord's Holy City, the church of Jesus Christ, not troubled you? When is the last time we wept over the weak condition of the beloved bride of Christ? Nehemiah was troubled, so much so that he wept. However he would not remain silent, nor would he be inactive. This godly man determined to return to his homeland and do what he could to alleviate the sorry state of affairs that existed. Obtaining letters of authority from the king, Nehemiah made his journey westward. Upon arrival in the city, and unbeknown to the rulers who "knew not whither [he] went, or what [he] did" (2:16), he surveyed the situation. Action was needed. Nehemiah, meeting with

the people, said, "Let us rise up and build" (2:18). And build they did. Though ridiculed, laughed to scorn, and despised, the people had a mind to work. Once organized, the people of Jerusalem joined ranks, determined to build the walls of the city and restore the defenses now in ruins.

However, it was not long before they faced opposition. At first it came in the form of ridicule and mockery. "What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" (2:19). "What are these feeble Jews doing? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they are building, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall" (4:2-3). Yet the work continued, and when Sanballat and Tobiah heard that the Jews were making progress, they determined to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder the work (4:8). Encouraged by Nehemiah, the people girded themselves with spears, shields, bows, and the habergeons (4:16), and with the sword in one hand and a hammer in the other, they continued to build. Eventually Tobiah and Sanballat send a message to Nehemiah inviting him to join them on the plains of Ono: "Come, let us meet together in *one of* the villages in the plain of Ono" (6:2). However, Nehemiah would not go. Repeated attempts to negotiate were faced with equal valor and determination by this saintly man of God. "I am doing a great work... why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (6:3). With a last ditch effort to stop the work, Sanballat and Tobiah hired Shemaiah to feign a retreat and plead with Nehemiah to join him in taking refuge in the temple. Shemaiah's advice was that Nehemiah flee for his life. "Let us meet...in the house of God...and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee" (6:10). Whereupon Nehemiah courageously answered: "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in" (6:11).

Please take note that Nehemiah was not concerned about his life. "I will **not** go in to save my life!" He was not the first, nor was he the last of faithful men and women who were willing to lay down their life for their God. Daniel, though captive in a strange land, determined that he would maintain his faith in God, and pray daily, opening his windows toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6). Though in violation of a quickly and

cleverly devised law, and under threat of being cast into the lion's den, Daniel, knowing the decree was signed: "Went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan. 6:10). Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego refused to bow before the king's idol, even in the face of death. When given one last chance to acquiesce, they answered the king:

If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (3:17-18).

Paul was of the same mind set. He counted "all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ" (Phi. 3:8), and when he met with the elders of Ephesus he told of his determination to fulfill his ministry: "But I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). The apostles faced insurmountable odds and threats on their life if they continued to preach and teach a resurrected Savior. What courage they manifested in the face of loss of life. Simon Greenleaf pointed out that "the annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of the like heroic constancy, patience, and unflinching courage" (Barfield 143). Of course Christ is the ultimate example of undying devotion to the Father. "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). He likewise encouraged us to have the same mind set. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (15:13). Through His apostle Paul our Lord instructed us:

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient *even* unto death, yea, the death of the cross (Phi. 2:5-8).

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not

accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:32-40).

Obviously, this is not to suggest that we ought not to respect life. Life should be joyous, and lived with a purpose (Ecc. 12:13). The clear message in God’s Word is that we should not place our life above the will of the Father, nor should we cherish life in this world above that which is eternal. Nehemiah did not fear for his life; he would not flee. What enabled him to manifest so much courage in the face of so much danger? We suggest the following.

HE DID NOT DESIRE THE DAINTIES OF LIFE

Think about Nehemiah’s situation prior to his return to Jerusalem. He was living in Shushan the palace and was the king’s cupbearer. No doubt he had it somewhat easier than his fellow countrymen, but he was willing to give that up so he might return to Jerusalem and work with his brethren. He was willing to make the sacrifice that he might receive the better reward. He realized that life consisted of much more than the abundance of the things he might possess. An unknown poet wrote a “Recipe For Living”:

Some things a man must surely know,
 If he is going to live and grow;
 He needs to know that life is more,
 Than what a man lays by in store;
 That more than all he may obtain,
 Contentment offers the greater gain.
 He needs to feel the thrill of mirth,
 And sense the beauty of the earth;
 To know the joy that kindness brings,
 And all the worth of little things.
 He needs to have an open mind,
 A friendly heart for all mankind;
 A trust in self, without conceit,
 And strength to rise above defeat.
 He needs to have a will to share,
 A mind to dream, a soul to dare;

A purpose firm, a path to plod,
A faith in man, a trust in God.

Paul likewise demonstrated the principle of proper priorities in his life. If any man could glory in physical accomplishments, it would have been this man of the cross. “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless” (Phi. 3:5-6). Yet, he considered all such things as *refuse* for the cause of Christ (3:8). Barnabas demonstrated the love for the spiritual above the physical when: “Having a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:37). An encourager of men, he joined with Paul on his first missionary journey and endured hardship and life-threatening situations to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Abraham likewise turned his back on the material and “looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Perhaps Moses, more than any other Old Testament character, epitomizes the complete rejection of the material over the spiritual.

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward (Heb. 11:24-25).

Wayne Jackson wrote:

Moses weighed the difference between the temporal and the eternal, between the material and the spiritual. In each case, he chose the latter. He valued the reward of heaven more than the treasures of Egypt... There is a modern illustration that may help us grasp more fully this vital concept. Howard Carter, a British archaeologist, has been doing excavations in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor (Thebes), Egypt for several years. However, his labor had been fruitless, and he was on the verge of abandoning the project. Then, in November of 1922, Carter came upon one of the most remarkable finds in the history of archaeological exploration. He discovered the tomb of the Pharaoh, Tut-ankh-amen. “King Tut,” as he has come to be known, reigned only briefly—seven to nine years—in the mid-14th century B.C. (according to the generally accepted chronology). The young Pharaoh was only about eighteen years old when he died... In a three-volume set, co-authored with professor A. C. Mace, Carter described his initial view into the ante-chamber which housed many of Tut’s treasures: “...as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere

the glint of gold.” When the king’s burial chamber was finally entered, a stone sarcophagus was discovered. It contained three successive coffins of amazing workmanship fashioned in the ruler’s likeness. The innermost was solid gold... But what is the significance of this find for Bible students? Prof. E. M. Blailock notes: “To the biblical student the interest lies in the picture which was presented of the wealth and glory of Egypt—the land and culture which Moses abandoned for God and for his people’s destiny. If the tomb of a boy king could produce the beauty, wealth, and art which has so astounded the world, what must the palace of really great pharaohs such as Ramses II have been like?” (Jackson 3).

One of the truly important lessons that our generation needs to learn (especially those in the Western world) is that taught by our Lord: “Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). The emphasis throughout the New Testament is upon the spiritual, not the material.

Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? (Mat. 6:25).

But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (6:33).

For bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance (1 Tim. 4:8-9).

Yes this calls for sacrifice. But sacrifice has been properly defined as “the forfeiture of something *highly valued* for the sake of one considered to have a greater value or claim” (McIntyre 7). We must learn to be “content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). If we would share Nehemiah’s sentiments, we cannot desire the dainties of life. Jim Elliot is credited with saying, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” (Popejoy 170).

HE WAS NOT MOVED BY MOCKERY

It was not long after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and began his great work of reform before he was ridiculed by Sanballat and Tobiah. When these evil men heard of Nehemiah’s work, they “laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?” (Neh. 2:19). When it was perceived that the work would go forward, the ridicule grew stronger: “What are these

feeble Jews doing?... Even that which they are building, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall” (4:2-3).

Through the years the Lord’s church has received more than its share of ridicule. In the early days of the restoration movement, those who opposed the effort would call us *Campbellites*. That mockery would extend into successive generations of New Testament Christians. Some years back this author wrote a series of articles in the local paper on the subject of baptism. A local denominational preacher attempted to answer, but as is often the case, his answer was not an appeal to the Bible, but to emotion. He called my position on baptism a “doctrine right out of the pits of hell.” No doubt many of us have been the recipients of those funny little jokes that tell of members of the church of Christ who at a latter time have finally arrived in heaven and are living off in some little corner by themselves, while those who pass by do so quietly because we think we are “the only ones in heaven.” All such efforts fall under the classification of mockery. They may arouse the emotions, but they do not address the issues.

The mockery of Tobiah and Sanballat did not seek to question the authority of Nehemiah, the vision he had, or the determination to build. Why is it that so many religious *errorists* think they establish their case by ridiculing the truth? Atheists, evolutionists, humanists, and the immoral homosexual community may ridicule, but their mockery is but a weak response to truth. This is not to say that ridicule is not effective, nor is it always wrong. When one is on the right side of truth and has established his case, an occasional mockery may be effective. Take the case of Elijah when he mocked the prophets of Baal. After every attempt was made on the part of the idol worshipers to have Baal answer their cries, Elijah “mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked” (1 Kin. 18:27). One of the most effective preachers and debaters of the past century was G. K. Wallace. He could use mockery effectively, but only because he was on the side of truth, and he “answer[ed] a fool according to his folly” (Pro. 26:5). In his debate with Ray Vaughn, brother Wallace was addressing Vaughn’s misunderstanding of the use of a dictionary. He first asked Vaughn and his moderator, “Do you fellows know the difference between a history and a dictionary?” When they did not answer, brother Wallace responded: “Some of you boys in the fifth reader get him off tomorrow and tell him the difference between a history and a dictio-

nary” (Wallace 67). While ridicule may intimidate the weak, the faithful will not be moved by mockery. To be shaken by the mockery of our enemies will prove disastrous. Peter was moved by the mockery of those about the campfire, and he ended up denying his Lord. Israel listened to the mockery of the ten spies who said, “We were in our own sight as grasshoppers” (Num. 13:29), and it cost them 40 years of wandering in the desert. If we are moved by mockery, it will be because we love this world above our Father in heaven. If we are moved by mockery, fear will invade our hearts and ridicule will rule our action. The key to overcoming cowardice in the face of mockery is to die to self. The following item came to me by e-mail; the author was not noted:

DYING TO SELF

When you are forgotten, or neglected, or purposely set at naught, and you don’t sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self.

When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any impunctuality, or any annoyance; when you stand face-to-face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility—and endure it as Jesus endured, that is dying to self.

When you are content with any food, any offering, any climate, any society, any raiment, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self.

When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or to record your own good works, or itch after commendations, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self.

When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor question God, while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, that is dying to self.

Nehemiah was not moved by mockery.

HE WAS NOT DEPRESSED BY DESTRUCTION

Try to imagine the situation that Nehemiah faced as he arrived at Jerusalem. “The walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire” (Neh. 2:13), and there was “much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall” (4:10). The streets must have been strewn with the mighty stones that once served as a defense to the inhabitants. The strength of Jerusalem now lay beneath the feet of those who trod its streets. It would have been easy for Nehemiah to grow weary with what he saw, pack up his bags, and make a hasty retreat back to Shushan where he could take his place in the splendor of the palace where things were in order, neat, and properly arranged. However, Nehemiah would not be depressed by destruction, and Israel was the better because of his great faith and determination.

Today, spiritual Israel lies in ruins. *Rubbish* clutters the streets of the Holy City of God. For at least three decades we have suffered at the destructive hands of false teachers. Change agents have, in many once mighty congregations, torn down the walls of distinction. We are surrounded by the *rubbish* of those who want to fellowship the denominations. Too many elderships have been infected by the rubbish of denominational thinking and have allowed the wolves in sheep’s clothing to rend and destroy the flock. We have been inundated with the *rubbish* of divorce and remarriage for any reason, immorality, covetousness, lukewarmness, ignorance, et al. It would be easy to become discouraged; to wipe our feet of the nonsense and refuse to address it any longer. It would be easy to turn a deaf ear to the cries of those who sacrificed so much to bring the restored church to the borders of this nation, who paid the price both emotionally and physically to plant the seed of simple New Testament Christianity from New York to California, Main to Florida, and points beyond. If Adam’s blood speaks from his grave, then the voices of our forefathers who labored diligently to reestablish the ancient order must be screaming from their tombs. What, then, shall we do? Take a look at Nehemiah’s response.

First, he **went to work**. He was what we might call a “realistic optimist.” He did not deny the rubbish was there, but he did not allow it to get him down. He rolled up his sleeves and went to work. Each and every one can bemoan the present situation of the Lord’s church, and sit down in our pity and discouragement; or we can, like Nehemiah, get

to work and do something about it. The former will spell certain disaster; the latter will contribute to the solution.

Second, he **delegated the work** so as to get the largest number of people involved. Space does not allow us to take a close look at chapter three, but even a most casual perusal of those verses reveals that Nehemiah was successful in getting a large number of his brethren to stand side by side in the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Third, he **encouraged the people in the work**. What a positive mental attitude this man possessed. "Ye see the evil case that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: **come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach**" (Neh. 2:17). "The God of heaven, he will prosper us" (2:20). "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down (6:3). Consequently the people had a mind to work. This does not mean that they ignored the *negative*, or turned a blind eye to the problems. However, it does mean that in spite of all the obstacles, yea the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, that **they did it!** I do not know who wrote the following, but it certainly describes this great man of God:

Somebody said it couldn't be done,
 But he with a chuckle replied
 That maybe it couldn't, but he would be one
 Who wouldn't say so till he tried.
 So he buckled right in, with a trace of a grin
 On his face, if he worried he hid it.
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn't be done, and he did it.
 Somebody scoffed, "Oh, you'll never do that;
 At least no one has ever done it.
 But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,
 And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
 With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
 Without any doubting or quit it,
 He started to sing as he tackled the thing
 That couldn't be done, and he did it.
 There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done;
 There are thousands to prophesy failure;
 There are thousands to point out to you, one by one,
 The dangers that wait to assail you.
 But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
 Then take off your coat and go to it;
 Just start in to sing as to tackle the thing
 That cannot be done, and you'll do it.

Nehemiah was not depressed by destruction.

HE DID NOT WALK WITH THE WORLDLY

Perhaps Nehemiah's greatest challenge was not the walls that lay in ruin, but the lives that were in shambles, morally speaking. The record is in Nehemiah 5:1-13 and 13:15-31. The problem in chapter five was one of greed and covetousness. Some of the parents had sold their own children into the bondage of slavery to cover expenses. To make matters worse, those who "held the note" were guilty of usury (excessive interest on the debt). In chapter 13 there was the misuse of the Sabbath day, unlawful marriages, and failure to bring up their children properly. Too many of God's children were being counted with the *covetous*. They were living like the world. Though they had received the law on Mt. Sinai, and "right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments" (9:13-14), they were allowing the lines of distinction to become blurred. We have the same problem today. Members of the Lord's church have so lost sight of their identity that they no longer know who they are, and in many instances they do not care. The children of the previous generation now speak the "language of Ashdod" (13:24), having long abandoned any pretext to the distinctive and holy living unto which they were called (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

How did Nehemiah address the problems? Chapter five gives me some clues. First, he was "angry when...[he] heard...these words" (Neh. 5:6). If we would lose sight of self to the extent that we would be willing to die for the cause of Christ, we must not become complacent with regard to sin and its consequences. Second, he identified the sin. Nehemiah "rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother" (5:7—KJV). He identified the sin irrespective of **who** was involved. Additionally, he was precise and concise in the terms he used to point out the sin: "Ye exact usury." He did not attempt to soften the language, cover up the sin, or change the terminology to make the offense seem less serious. Third, he called for repentance and change: "It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?... I pray you, let us leave off this usury" (5:9-10—KJV).

May we suggest that these two pressing problems that Nehemiah faced were representative of the type of life lived by the ungodly. Nehemiah refused to follow their example and chose instead to deal with the problem in a forceful and divinely authorized way. The im-

portant lesson for us is that we, like Nehemiah, must refuse to associate with those who live unholy lives. Paul told us that "evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). When we become friends with the world, we make ourselves enemies of God (Jam. 4:1-4). John instructed us: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15). It is a proven fact that the closer we get to any individual, the greater our willingness to do good for, and even sacrifice for, that individual. If we draw close to God, we will, like Nehemiah, be willing to lay down our life for Him. However, if we draw close to the world, our willingness to sacrifice for what the world has to offer will increase, and our love for the Father will decrease. Once we are friends with the world, we think like the world, live like the world, our goals will be those of the world, and the emphasis will be placed on the physical. Life will become the all-consuming priority in our lives.

Nehemiah did not walk with the worldly.

HE DID NOT CONSENT TO COMPROMISE

Sanballat and Tobiah were getting desperate. The work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was near completion. "There was no breach left therein; (though even unto that time I [Nehemiah] had not set up the doors in the gates)" (Neh. 6:1). Before the doors could be installed "Sanballat and Geshem... thought to do me [Nehemiah] mischief" (6:2). Their plan called for an attempt to get Nehemiah to compromise, perhaps in some way to get him to join their ranks. They sent unto Nehemiah requesting that he "come, let us meet together in *one of* the villages in the plain of Ono" (6:2). But Nehemiah would not go, and sent back this message: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (6:3). Sanballat, like Balak of old, would not give up, and sent once and again: "Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together" (6:7).

Compromise has been one of the most effect tools in Satan's arsenal. It is the devil's tool for defeat for those who love the things of the world. Many a soul who, at one time determined to remain steadfast, has been taken in by compromise. Balaam listened to Balak and eventually compromised. He did not curse God's people; he blessed them, but he compromised and placed a stumbling block in their path (Num. 31:16). Compromise may provide an easy and convenient way to avoid doing what God would have us to do, but it does not lead to stability of

character and courage that will motivate one to deny self at all costs. God expects His people to stay the course. When Israel was about to cross the Jordan they were told: “Ye shall observe to do therefore as Jehovah your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Deu. 5:32). J. W. McGarvey once commented on the need to avoid compromise:

You are on the right road, and whatever you do don't let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshiping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I have never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinctions between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today. It won't work (Mabe 128).

William Cline wisely observed:

Compromise is truly a Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The absence of it in matters of judgment has caused untold division and heartache in the Lord's church. On the other hand, the very presence of it in matters of faith has, and can, cause tremendous damage (2).

Curtis Dowdy told the following story. It illustrates the foolishness of compromise.

“Fresh Fish For Sale Today”

A man starting in the fish business hung out a sign with the message, “Fresh Fish for Sale Today,” and invited his friends to the opening. They all congratulated him on his enterprise, but one suggested that his sign might be improved. Said he, “Why the ‘Today’? Of course it is today, not yesterday or tomorrow.” So the fishmonger removed the word. Another said, “Why the ‘For Sale’? Everybody knows that, else why the store?” And off came the words. Another complained, “Why the word ‘Fresh’? Your integrity guarantees every fish to be fresh.” Finally only “Fish” remained, but one objector said, “Why the sign? I smelled your fish two blocks away” (311).

Sacred history is strewn with the wreckage of those who tried to compromise and failed. Israel compromised and asked for a “king” like the nations about them. It led to their ruination, and they **did** become like the nations about them. Saul compromised and saved king Agag but lost his kingship. Demas compromised and loved this present world, leading to his departure from the company of the faithful and his

heavenly Father. Let us consider some ways we might be tempted to compromise.

First, we compromise when we soften our preaching to avoid ridicule. Paul was not a "man pleaser" (Gal. 1:10). His life proved his claim. His preaching made people angry. Consequently, he bore "branded on...[his] body the marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). Because he refused to compromise he "received...forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was...beaten with rods, once was...stoned," spent a "a night and a day... in the deep." His physical suffering was compounded by his mental anguish and "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:23-28). The pioneer preachers, up to and including the preachers that preceded our generation, preached a distinctive message. It was clear and concise. G. K. Wallace was personally acquainted with the late Marshall Keeble. Brother Wallace recounted an occasion in which brother Keeble was preaching a meeting wherein more than 100 people were baptized, mostly from the denominations. A denominational preacher came to the meeting, got upset, and told brother Keeble that he should not upset other churches but work with them. Keeble replied, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. It's rooting time" (Wallace 261). Brother Keeble was not a compromiser.

Second, we compromise when we conform our lives to the pattern of the world. Paul wrote:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

We have seen brethren strike a happy medium when it comes to dress. They may still think that it is immodest to join a nudist colony, but see no harm in frequenting the local swimming pool with little more than a loin cloth or halter top covering the body: these have compromised. Others would be among the first to vote against a casino in their city but do not hesitate to purchase a lottery ticket: these have compromised. The great danger in this area is that we will grow insensitive to the immorality about us, and eventually capitulate and join ranks with the world. As the poet noted:

Vice is a monster of such frightful mien
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,

We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Third, we compromise when we try to make Genesis 1 fit into the evolutionary theory of origins. Paul warned against science that is “falsely so called” (1 Tim. 6:20). If there was ever a “science falsely so called,” it is the so-called “science of evolution.” Too many have compromised by teaching that Genesis 1-11 are a *myth*. Unfortunately, some of these compromisers are in the Lord’s church and teaching at some of *our* colleges.

Fourth, we compromise when we seek to bring the Lord’s church in line with the denominations and open wide the doors of fellowship with any and every brand of “Christianity,” so long as they do not deny the essential ones of Ephesians 4:4-6. This has led to widespread fellowship with the denominations in various activities, including joint participation in things like “Thanksgiving Day worship services.” Some folks think fellowship is something you do in the church “fellowship hall” while attempting to balance a paper plate piled high with food in one hand and a glass of iced tea in the other. Some of the self-designated “change agents” think fellowship is limitless, no *holds-barred*, and full steam ahead on the good ship “Fellow-ship.” Who cares if there is a little diversity or difference of opinion? After all, “We’re all headed for the same shore; we just happen to have a little different opinion as to how to get there!” So what if the navigational chart and compass have been thrown overboard? It reminds me of that captain aboard the Boeing 747 who told his passengers: “We’ve lost all navigational equipment, our radios are out of order, and we have no earthly idea where we are. But, hey, we’re making **g-r-e-a-t** time!” Several years ago Mark Henderson threw away his compass and chart at the Abilene Lectures. Here is a portion of his *speech*:

Another preacher asked me to meet him at the Ministerial Fellowship’s weekly prayer meeting. Ours is the only Church of Christ in Boulder, so I accepted the chance to meet these **colleagues in ministry** [emph. mine—TW], though I had some anxiety about how we would deal with our many differences. I needn’t have worried. Those 15 or 20 men didn’t come together to debate; they came together each week to get to the serious business of prayer. As I sat there the better part of an hour, I found a lump forming in my throat while I listened to these men from so many different fellowships unite with one voice before the Lord for the sake of each other and for the sake of the lost of Boulder. Finally, I interrupted and told them who I was and which church I was from. I told them about struggles we were facing in our

church, and asked for their prayers [sort of like Elijah asking the prophets of Baal to pray for him—TW]. Nothing in my experience could have prepared me for what happened next. For the next ten minutes, all they did was pray for me and our congregation.... As I listened to the voices of all those men, whom many of us have regarded as enemies, flooding me and flooding us with their prayers, great tears of release began to roll down my cheeks as I received the anointing with the precious oil of unity (Dobbs 3-4).

Bill Banowsky threw his navigation chart and compass away more than a decade ago when he joined hands with the Methodist Church on January 5, 1986, and lauded the preacher and congregation of that man-made institution. He then burned his bridges behind him at the aforementioned Abilene Christian University Lecture when he advocated fellowship with denominationalism. In his speech brother Banowsky admitted that he had outgrown the idea of “an identifiably exclusive church.” He went so far as to suggest that those of us who presently hold to the *old paths* need to confess our “self-righteousness to our neighbors.” He advised that instead of isolating ourselves from “our neighbors” that we should join hands with them in those things in which we can agree. He sees the “other sheep” of John 10:16 as a reference to those in the denominations and suggests that we extend fellowship to them. Oh, yes, he has thrown his chart and compass overboard into the depths of the sea. Rubel Shelly not only lost his chart and compass, he abandoned ship in the early 1980s and has been floundering in the muddy waters of “unity in diversity” in a sinking life raft named “The U.S.S. New Hermeneutic.” Down in San Antonio, Texas, Max Lucado commended: “The great and notable work that God has done through this Trinity Oaks [Baptist] church over the last decade. To accept you, to extend a hand of love and appreciation; to cast our vote in favor of you, as fellow-workers in this great dream that we have” (Deaver 3).

Before we leave this point on compromise, we want to consider the advice of a fellow preacher who has passed to his reward, but whose words are worth serious and sober reflection.

“Compromising”

by Gus Nichols

As far as the denominational world is concerned, our greatest danger, no doubt, lies in the temptation to compromise and become a sister denomination with the sects around us.... When we were weak the sects blustered and challenged for debate. They publicly reviewed our sermons and fought us openly and bitterly. But they soon found that

their doctrines and practices were no match for the “Thus saith the Lord” which our preachers hurled back at them with withering force and power. They next began to fight us to our backs and secretly organize against us, and tried to create all the prejudice against us they could. But they saw us grow in spite of their campaign of villainy against us. Now that we are waxing popular, they are making love to us. They are now using their most powerful weapon. It is compromise. They want us to exchange pulpits with them, and, of course, be too nice to preach the truth, or point out any of their errors. They want us to join with them in the Ministerial Alliance, where compromise is the order of the day. They want us to join with them in Union Revivals where sectarians, ignorant of God’s plan of salvation, do the preaching. They want us to call on them to lead our prayers, when they are in our services, regardless of whether they have been baptized into Christ or not (Rom. 6:3). They want us to recognize them as right in doctrine and practice, as though contradictory doctrines could all be right. They want us to preach on the things which all like believe and leave off doctrinal preaching, as they call it. Now, if you do not believe there is danger in this appeal for compromise, look around and you may be surprised to find that some of us have already fallen for this sort of thing.

Then some brother in society, or standing high in the business world, brings his friends to hear “our preacher.” He wants his friends to like “our church.” So, he, too, wants the saving power taken out of the message. If the preacher preaches it straight, as it is in the Book, the love of God and His precious promises, together with the facts of sin and death, hell fire and brimstone, and some are offended and heard to express dissatisfaction with the preacher and the church, some may put on a move to change preachers. So, here is a danger facing the church, and tends to corrupt the gospel and please the people, rather than try to save them and please the Lord (Nichols 7).

Nehemiah would not consent to compromise.

CONCLUSION

We are not left to wonder why Nehemiah would courageously say, “Should Such A Man As I Flee?” An examination of the book that he authored shows: (1) he did not desire the dainties of life, (2) he was not moved by mockery, (3) he was not depressed by destruction, (4) he did not walk with the worldly, and (5) he did not consent to compromise. If we would deny ourselves and faithfully follow our Lord, we can do no less.

Thus, we have seen:

1. We must not **major** in the **material**.
2. We must not be **moved by the mockery of others**.

3. We must not become **depressed by the destruction** about us.
4. We cannot be **counted with the covetous**—*i.e.*, participate in the extortion and greed that others embrace.
5. We cannot **consent to compromise**.

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“WHY IS THE HOUSE OF GOD FORSAKEN?” NEHEMIAH 13:11

Gary L. Grizzell



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INTRODUCTION

Israel, the northern kingdom, had been taken captive by Assyria. Judah, the southern kingdom, had fallen into Babylonian captivity. Judah and the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the temple burned (2 Kin. 25:21; 2 Chr. 36:17-21). There had been three invasions in all. God had used Nebuchadnezzar to take Judah into captivity for 70 years because of the sins of the people (2 Chr. 36:14-16). However, now the 70 years have passed and God's people have returned to Jerusalem. Nehemiah, who served as both the military and political leader, has led God's people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 6:15). "Chapters 1-7 deal with the rebuilding of the wall; 8-12 include the reading of the law and the pledge of faithfulness; the final chapter enumerates various problems and how they were dealt with" (Summers 21). Brother Garland Elkins accurately described the events recorded in Nehemiah chapter 13:10-22 as follows:

Tithes Were Withheld from the Support of the Priests, Temple Worship Was Not According to God's Will. The tithes for the support of the priests and of the temple worship were withheld, for the poorest of the flocks and herds had been brought for sacrifice: the blind, the torn of wild beasts, the sick, those of little or no use to themselves (Mal. 1:7-8; 3:8-10). Thus they dishonored God and robbed Him of His due, and the penalty had fallen upon them. The priests and Levites had been compelled to go to their homes and earn a living, since the people refused to support them in their religious work, and this resulted in the temple services being neglected. When Nehemiah perceived this state of things he said, "Then I contended with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place" (Neh. 13:11) (265).

PAUL'S INSPIRED ARGUMENTS FOR PREACHER SUPPORT

1 Corinthians 9:4-16

What is preaching? Someone once said, "Preaching is, to God's word, what the feather is to the arrow: it is that which directs it to the mark." Another described preaching as: "Truth through personality." *Preach* contains the words *reach* and *each*, and thus signifies that when we preach we are to reach each person's ears with the Gospel of Christ (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). In the worship of the Lord's church, **preaching is an act of public worship; it has as its participants both preacher and congregation; its purpose is to edify; its design is to please God.**

What is the work of a preacher in local work? Timothy was commanded to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Brother Clyde Findley (now deceased), who was the first director of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, once told his students to remember the three-legged stool of preaching: *Preaching, Personal Work, and Prayer*. We observe these three aspects in the life of Paul. The great apostle preached publicly and did personal work (private teaching) as seen in Acts 20:20. Then we see his great example and godly behavior regarding prayer in Philipians 1:4.

Paul was a located preacher for about the space of three years with the church at Ephesus and his work involved teaching publicly and from house to house: "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). This approved example gives New Testament authority for the existence and practice of a located preacher

today. Additionally, Paul was supported by a plurality of churches while preaching in a different area of the Roman Empire. He wrote to the church at Corinth: “I robbed other churches, taking wages *of them*, to do you service” (2 Cor. 11:8). Thus, faithful missionary preachers today may be supported by the church.

Verse 4: Have we not power to eat and to drink?

Paul pointed out that he as an apostle and as a preacher of the Gospel had the scriptural right to eat and drink by being financially supported by God’s people, the church. When necessary Paul made tents to provide for his necessities (Acts 18:1-3; 1 The. 2:9).

Verse 5: Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?

It is learned here that the apostle Peter was married and in his work of preaching was financially supported by the church. He was supported sufficiently to be able to support his wife as well. Paul reasons with his Corinthian brethren that he (Paul) as well, being unmarried, was also deserving of support.

Other apostles were supported by the church in their work of preaching and even having the responsibility of taking care of “a sister, a wife.” Should not Paul additionally be allowed support to keep spirit and body together as he sacrificially gave his life to the work of preaching?

Also, what of the brethren of the Lord? They were allowed to be supported, and thus Paul should be allowed this privilege.

Verse 6: Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

Barnabas traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey as recorded in Acts 13-14. Evidently the prejudice against Paul was extended also to his traveling companion and fellow preacher Barnabas. Some among the Corinthians were denying Paul’s genuineness and apostleship. As a result, it is easy to see why such characters would be against Paul receiving financial support from the church.

When Paul wrote that he and Barnabas had the right to forbear working, he did not imply preaching is not work. Paul had the right to forego secular work so that he might concentrate on sacred work.

Verse 7: Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?

In arguing for preacher support by asking the question: "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?" the apostle Paul reveals the parallel between the state support of a soldier and the church support of a preacher. As it was in the first century, so it is today with the government approved and appointed soldier, he is materially supported with the necessities of life. He is given the physical necessities of life that he may give his full concentration and attention to his work of soldiering. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of *this* life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4). Likewise, the Gospel preacher who labors full-time in the work of preaching needs (and deserves) a mind free of worry concerning the necessities of life for himself and his family. Then he may give his full attention to the greatest work in the world, the work of Gospel preaching (1 Tim. 5:8).

The inspired writer's next argument for preacher support is from the work of the farmer. Paul asked: "Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?" A vinedresser or farmer toils in the ground for the precious fruit and harvest of the earth. He labors to sell his harvest for profit. This is only appropriate as well as eating the results of his own labor. Likewise, the Holy Spirit revealed through the apostle's statement that the messenger of the gospel has the right to benefit from his labor too. His ministering to members of the church in spiritual matters produces spiritual fruit in the form of the salvation of their souls. It is only appropriate that members of the church (the field of his labor) render or minister to his need for material necessities of life. This is according to the wisdom of God's plan.

Next, Paul draws an argument for preacher support from the shepherd who is the owner and keeper of his flock. Paul asked: "Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" It is only right he receive assistance from those he serves. He expects to be rewarded for his labor.

Verse 8: Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?

Paul writes as an inspired man, not an uninspired man. The source of his writing about preaching and God's plan for the support of

preaching is from God, not mere men. Even the Law of Moses revealed that God had a plan to provide for the working beast.

Verse 9-10: For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

Deuteronomy 25:4 is quoted by Paul concerning the ox.

In the East to the present day they do not after reaping carry the sheaves home to barns as we do, but take them to an area under the open air to be threshed by the oxen treading them with their feet, or else drawing a threshing instrument over them (compare Micah 4:13). Doth God... care for oxen?—rather, “Is it for the oxen that God careth?” Is the animal the ultimate object for whose sake this law was given? No. God does care for the lower animal (Psalms 36:6, Matthew 10:29), but it is with the ultimate aim of the welfare of man... In the humane consideration shown for the lower animal, we are to learn that still more ought it to be exercised in the case of man, the ultimate object of the law; and that the human (spiritual as well as temporal) laborer is worthy of his hire (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown).

Verse 11: If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

Are not spiritual things greater than material things?

Verse 12: If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

False apostles had received the respect of some in the church at Corinth, yet some in Corinth were unwilling to give towards Paul's personal need though he had labored in behalf of their spiritual need (2 Cor. 11:13, 20). Then again, they apparently had been willing to help certain genuine preachers (1 Cor. 9:5).

Verse 13: Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

God designed that the priests who offered animal sacrifices brought by the people be allowed to eat part of the animal for necessary food (see Lev. 7:6; Num. 18:6; Deu. 18:1).

Verse 14: Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

Just as God designed the people of God to provide for the physical food of the priests, so the church of Christ today is to provide for the necessities of the Gospel preacher. The writer once heard a brother say that it would be wrong if a preacher bought his own house if he were supported solely by the church. Shame! Such little thinking hinders the church and reveals in whom the greed really lies. Once a preacher earns his income, it belongs to him to exercise good stewardship for his family.

Verse 15: But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for *it were* better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

Due to their immaturity Paul was careful with them.

Verse 16: For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Paul felt the woe of God was upon him if he did not preach the gospel and would not allow immature brethren who were unwilling to support him to discourage keep him from continuing to preach the Gospel.

A STUDY OF ROMANS 10:13-18 WHEN YOU SUPPORT THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, YOU SUPPORT GOOD THINGS

The inspired apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome that those who call upon the name of the Lord “shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). Salvation from sin is under discussion. Sin is the transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). Calling on the name of the Lord refers to simple obedience to the gospel. In Acts 2:21 the apostle Peter stated the same thing that Paul did here. Included in Peter’s preaching of calling on the name of the Lord was his telling those who believed the teaching on the Deity of Christ, the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, that they were to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Upon their obedience, about three-thousand souls were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:41). Calling on the Lord had taken place, that is, obedience to the Gospel plan of salvation.

Next, Paul asked the brethren in Rome certain rhetorical questions designed to draw attention to the importance of the messenger of the Gospel. First, Paul asked: "How then shall they [the lost] call on him in whom they have not believed?" The answer is they cannot. Second: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" The answer is they cannot believe. Third, the question: "How shall they hear without a preacher?" The answer is they cannot hear without a preacher. Paul's argument is that some things are a matter of common sense and logic. To respond to a message, believe in a message, hear a message, there must first be a message, and then there absolutely must be a messenger!

Next, Paul points out in Romans 10:15 that there must be a sender for preaching to be accomplished. The rhetorical question is asked: "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" A preacher must prepare himself in character and in a knowledge of the Gospel, but unless he is supported financially, he is stalemated. He is defeated before he starts.

Paul wrote of the feet of the messenger of glad tidings. Why? The mode of travel back then, in many cases, was the feet. Think of all the traveling over the ground of Palestine Jesus did with His feet. The feet do refer to the mode of travel but metaphorically commend the willingness of the preacher to go preach. So, a blessing, an honor is being attributed to the individual who is willing to make whatever preparation is necessary and then go imparting the message of the Gospel.

The Gospel is full of *glad tidings* and *good things*. Paul tells the Ephesian brethren that all spiritual blessings are in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). Consider the satisfying knowledge that only the truth can give (John 8:32). "You have a good kind of knowledge," were the words of an ex-convict to this writer as I drove him around to job appointments on the southeast coast of Florida a number of years ago. This scribe had sought to teach him while we rode together. Interestingly, this turned out to be about the only truthful thing this man had said to me the whole week I had tried to help him. Later, he even pretended he had been hired, just to continue to receive a hand-out. How sad. Sadder was the fact he rejected this good knowledge which the Gospel gives.

"We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding" (1 John 5:20). What other book truthfully gives one a knowledge of one's origin (Gen. 1:1, 26), purpose of existence (Ecc. 12:13-14), and eternal destiny (John 5:28-29)? The world with all of its

humanistic ideologies for happiness is empty and unable to satisfy the soul. The only time *philosophy* is found in the King James Version of the Bible it is condemned (Col. 2:8). Paul wrote to beware lest anyone spoil or rob brethren through false philosophy.

God made Adam, the first man, with a mind designed for the reception of truth, not error. We are from Adam by procreation and our minds are made for truth, not error. We must choose with the faculty of mind, the will, which God has given us, to accept only truth with regard to matters of salvation. Put mud in your car in place of gas and see what happens. Now put false philosophy for living and for happiness into your mind and see what happens! Jesus tells us to continue in His Word so we will know the truth, and the truth will make us free (John 8:31-32). The Gospel of salvation through Christ is full of good things (see Gal. 5:22-23). So, when you support the preacher of the Gospel with your enthusiasm, your prayers, and your contributions on the first day of the week, you are supporting *good things* (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

**A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-25
WHEN YOU SUPPORT THE PREACHING
OF THE GOSPEL, YOU SUPPORT
“THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING”**

Paul wrote that the correct (the right) message is to be preached, which we are to support (see 1 Cor. 1:17). *Wisdom of words* refers to eloquent speech, entertaining speech, but speech lacking in the truth of God's will. *The cross of Christ* stands for the preaching of the message about the cross of Christ. Paul informs us that the preaching of the *wisdom of words* makes the true message *of none effect*. Now, if the preaching of the wisdom of words makes the gospel of none effect, what would the opposite be? The preaching of *the cross* would make the gospel of full effect on the hearts of men! It is the only power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). It is that which *effectually worketh* in those who believe (1 The. 2:13).

In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it can be seen that the opinion of the value of the gospel depends on which of the two groups in which one chooses to dwell. Two groups that existed in the first century in relation to the reception of the gospel (and today) were (are): (1) “Them that perish.” Those are the perishing, those not right with God, and those who are unprepared to meet God in the judgment. (2) Those who “are saved.”

This class represents those right with God and who are most certainly prepared to meet their maker.

To those who are perishing, the Gospel is to them *foolishness*. They thus consider the Gospel as but a foolish philosophy by which to live. On the other hand, the Gospel is to those who are being saved, *the power of God*. They know that the Gospel is the power to cleanse from sin. As the song which is sung by God's faithful people: "What can wash away my sin?... the blood of Jesus." The Gospel is the power to raise up from the grave and the power to give eternal life.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 1:19-20, Paul tells us who really has a message of foolishness. The wisdom of God is contrasted with the wisdom of the world. God had prophesied through Isaiah that those in this first class (those who are perishing) really are the ones who have the foolish wisdom (Isa. 29:14).

A challenge is put forth in that the representatives of the world were challenged to step forth to match their wisdom with God's for man's problems and needs. (1) *The wise* (representatives of the Gentiles) were to step forth to meet the challenge. Kings of the earth had a court for wise men who counseled him. They are being challenged to step forth. (2) *The scribe* (representatives of the Jews who were public teachers of the Israelites) were now challenged to step forth. (3) *The disputer of this world*, that is, the one who was a public debater, who could serve as a spokesman for the world's ideologies, were then challenged to step forth with a message better than the gospel to solve man's problem with sin. The Greek philosophers such as the orators of Athens were being called out by Paul to dare offer a better message than that of the Gospel.

The question Paul asked in verse 20 he answers in verse 21. Paul stated that "in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God." God had given two systems of religion for men prior to the Christian age. However, during this time man did not prove that he could originate a philosophy for living that would solve man's spiritual problems. Only the Gospel could solve man's need for joy, happiness, freedom from guilt, the need to overcome death and the grave, and the need to know the answers to the greatest questions of existence. Paul said it this way, "the world by wisdom [man's uninspired wisdom; Godless wisdom] knew not God." In all the worldly wisdom of the *greats* of the earth, not one of them had discovered how to meet man's greatest need—the need to know God their creator. The philosophers of Paul's day were only interested in hearing some new thing, but not

really interested in actually finding the truth concerning God and their own existence. The Stoics, Epicureans, and philosophers Paul encountered at Athens (the center of learning of the Romans) were wanting to hear or tell of something new (Acts 17:21). Their interest in hearing Paul was from that misguided mind set.

The latter part of 1 Corinthians 1:21 states that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Consider things said here about the Gospel of Christ:

1. It is the preaching of "the wisdom of God" (21)
2. It is the opposite of preaching the "wisdom of words" (17)
3. It is the preaching of "the cross of Christ" (17)
4. It is the preaching we are to do to those who are perishing (18)
5. It is the preaching of *power* to those who choose to be saved (18)
6. It is the opposite of *the wisdom of the wise* (19)
7. It is the message, the power, the wisdom that brings to nothing the so-called *understanding* of the prudent of this world (19)
8. It made the wisdom of the wise man (of this world), the scribe (the religious teacher who misinterpreted and misapplied the Word of God), and the disputer of this world (the great humanistic orators and their followers) look like the fools they were and their shallow theories seen as false (20-21)
9. The preaching of the Gospel is referred to as "the foolishness of preaching" (21). Paul is using sarcasm here. He did not believe that the preaching of the Gospel was really foolishness. Think so-called before *foolishness* here. The context is found in 1 Corinthians 1:18 in that those who chose to perish were those who considered the preaching of the Gospel as *foolishness*. Paul said that the Gospel is power and wisdom, so we know that he was using sarcasm in referring to it as the *foolishness of preaching*. Paul did not say that *foolish preaching* is what pleases God! In view of the misguided preaching of some today, it would seem that some think Paul did mean such.

Paul then gives the reason that the preaching of the Gospel message is considered foolishness by the Jewish and Greek culture of his day.

“The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:22). The Jews and Greeks seem to have the indifferent attitude of some today who say: “Preachers are answering questions nobody is asking.” Could it be that the lost are so ignorant that they do not even know the right questions to ask and therefore preachers are justified in answering questions which it seems no one is asking?

“Why, you are not up with the times,” some say to the Gospel preacher who preaches the Gospel as it is in Christ Jesus. Did it never occur to them that the Gospel is always relevant to man’s true needs and particularly his problem with sin? “Why anyone can start a religion like that,” the scoffer says. To which a Christian might reply: “Yeah, it is easy, just die on a cross and be raised from the dead on the third day.”

Of course Paul was called a *babbler*, by the philosophers of Athens. Unbelievers told the apostle that he had brought strange things to their ears (Acts 17:20), yet this simply proved that the Greeks sought after lofty wisdom only a few could comprehend. Today we have those even in the church who want something with a *splash* (like the Jews wanted a sign). So the sermon of the hireling preacher consists of a poem, an illustration, and a prayer, without any Bible. The Greeks thought the message of the Gospel was too simplistic and were expecting something deeper—something only those who have a high IQ could grasp. However, little did they understand that the wisest man who walked the face of the earth was heard gladly by the common people.

Paul implied that he, the apostles, and the early Christians in preaching the Gospel were giving the whole world what they needed to hear in place of what they wanted to hear. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). Ever noticed that someone tells you something you do not want to hear it seems foreign to you? “You left your lights on and your battery is dead.” “Huh, would you repeat that?” The Jews wanted a Prophet to appear on the scene and do great signs when they wanted it, where they wanted it, the size they wanted, and the results they wanted! So Jesus would mock them by giving them a sign such as the sign of Jonah, knowing they would not be able to interpret and properly apply the meaning of the sign. “And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet” (Luke 11:29). The Jews had possessed Jonah for years but had

not understood the sign of Jonah in the belly of the great fish, that it would refer to the burial and resurrection of Christ. Jesus nullified their expectation by pointing to a sign to read instead of a visible sign for their immediate gratification. The Jews, like many today, wished to fit God into their mold of what they thought God should be like.

Paul summed up the Gospel as *Christ crucified* (1 Cor. 1:23). He says the same in the next chapter (2:1-2). The doctrine of Christ includes more than the facts surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection, but such is the heart of the glad tidings. However, the theme of Paul's writing here is that the wisdom of God, as seen in the Gospel message, is greater than the wisdom of this world! His theme is not what the Gospel (doctrine) includes and excludes.

The Gospel became a stumblingblock to some and foolishness to others. It was not the problem, but the choice of the hearer was the problem. Lacking the proper virtues, one becomes *blind* and *cannot see* afar off (1 Pet. 1:9). This is like a woman who saw everything dirty through her living room window. Every neighbor who walked by needed a bath! It stays this way until one day a friend dropped by and said, "You need to clean your window, it has dirt all over it." She did and no one looked as dirty as she thought earlier. The problem had been with her lack of cleaning all along. She was too busy looking and not doing enough cleaning. When the window of the heart has been cleansed by the grace of God and the blood of Christ, one can see much better. Jesus put it: "Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat. 5:8).

Paul instructs us as to who hears with the window of their minds in 1 Corinthians 1:24. The *called* refers to those who chose (choose) to be part of the called out ones (the church). It is a choice, not an overwhelming of the will of another by an outside influence or force. People who obeyed the Gospel were those who chose to gladly receive the Word of God (Acts 2:41, 47).

Those who choose to hear the preaching and supported the preaching which *pleased God* (though considered foolishness by the world of unbelievers) saw the message of Christ crucified as power and wisdom. They considered the message as "the power of God." Why the power of God? They, unlike the Jews who demanded a particular miraculous sign from Christ (to prove His Deity) chose to be aware of God showing His power the way that He wanted. Thus, when they saw the miracle that God wanted to do—the raising of His Son from the

dead—they considered that not *weakness* but *power* of the greatest kind.

Those who listened to the preaching of the cross of Christ considered the message as “the wisdom of God.” Why the wisdom of God? They, unlike the pompous, vain Greek philosophers, saw the unfolding scheme of redemption marveled in God’s wisdom to redeem men from sin.

When lovers of Truth considered the Old Testament lamb offered as a burnt offering, it prepared their minds to appreciate Christ as a lamb being offered for the sins of the world. They realized that Christ’s offering was the wisdom of the highest kind. Peter states that we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb” (1 Pet. 1:19).

When a person hears, believes, and obeys the preaching of *good things*, he shows his deep appreciation for “the power of God” and the “wisdom of God.” When we preach the Gospel or support the Gospel being preached, we are helping the dissemination of “the power of God” and the wisdom of God.”

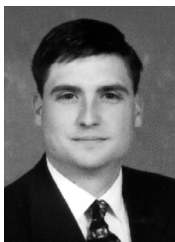
The preacher (the Christian) is like a man who owned the only soap factory in a world of dirty people in need of a bath. How zealous would that owner of the only soap factory tell of his factory and the soap in his factory? When we support the Gospel being preached, whether it is by (1) helping support a missionary abroad, or (2) supporting the preacher in the local congregation, then we are supporting the only message that results in: wisdom (Jam. 1:5), righteousness (Tit. 2:10-12), sanctification (John 17:17), and redemption (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

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“WHO KNOWETH WHETHER THOU ART COME TO THE KINGDOM FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?” ESTHER 4:14

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INTRODUCTION

The canvas of biblical history is painted with both bright and dark colors. At times the canvas portrays the brilliance of valor and the unwavering resolve needed to accomplish tasks that for some, with an “under the sun” perspective, seemed otherwise impossible at first glance. There are other times when dark colors seem to bleed from the canvas, when vice and rebellion attract the most attention and seem, for the moment, to overshadow the good. Without much consideration, one might think that the black strokes upon the canvas ruin the picture. And there is no doubt that the picture would send a message of gloom and despair if the dark colors alone were painted. However the bright offsets the dark, and it takes the dark strokes on the canvas to appreciate more fully the bright. That is, the record of sin and shame makes the record of deliverance and Divine care for man all the more brilliant. The same works in reverse; the darkness of sin could not be seen as such unless the price for redemption was known. With that said, the history of the Bible moves back and forth between lush and lean years and between times of rebellion and righteousness. Even when all seems threatened, and hope is regarded by some as a faint idea, the contrast is

present—that God provides for the faithful, ensures the completion of His will and provides a way of escape. If one lesson can be learned from Bible history it is this: God is faithful.

By the time the book of Esther opens, long years have passed in Israel's existence as a nation. Accordingly, the pages of their record are filled with the ups and downs so frequently encountered in the Sacred Text (from beginning to end). Like Paul would mention to the Galatians, men who start off well sometimes cease from obeying the truth (Gal. 5:7). In Israel's case, it appears that as little as three days had passed since the Red Sea experience before a growing disdain toward God's authority and provisions was manifested (Exo. 15:20-26). In spite of all that God had wrought in Egypt and provided during the wilderness tenure, the people continued their stiff-necked ways—hence, the winnowing process. Cleansed from the wickedness of their elders (including parents), the younger generation entered the land of Canaan with a solemn warning about the consequences of apostasy (Lev. 26; Deu. 28). Whether life or death, blessing or cursing, this was their own choice to make.

An incomplete conquest of the land sealed their doom, for the influences left in the land proved spiritually devastating to the people. In the passing of time, Israel experienced the period of the judges, wars too numerous to list here, and a rift and division in the kingdom. Samaria and the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians (722 B.C.), and Judah fell not long afterward (605-586 B.C.) to the Babylonians. When the "seventy years" were fulfilled, and the people were released to go back into Palestine, roughly nine hundred years had been painted of Israel's history. Though some paint strokes were as black as night, God had shown throughout the entire ordeal that light triumphs over dark. Regardless of the negative scenes found scattered in the record of history, the work of God in the Scheme of Redemption—especially counting the few righteous souls who stood with Him—outweighs everything else by far.

Yet the history is far from being complete. The return of the Jews to Palestine brings its own unique set of circumstances, and, it is during this time that the record of Esther is placed within its appropriate context. In fact, as Cook states, the book of Esther "is the sole authority for the period and circumstances of which it treats" (488). Without the details provided in the book, nothing could be known of those Jews who opted to remain in Persia nor of many crucial events during the

reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus). It is most unfortunate that there should be any doubt as to the authenticity of the book, for the evidence of its inspiration is undeniable. And the major concern for many—the absence of the name of God—is quickly dismissed as a concern when the theme of the book is realized: the providence of God. Only when the book’s purpose is realized will the question here for examination be understood in full: “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?” (Est. 4:14).

THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION

A verse by verse commentary is not the purpose of this treatise—only to convey the basic context enough to establish the importance of the question presented in Esther 4:14. The remarkable series of events and the relationship of the main characters to those events must be understood if the lesson on providence is to be seen as the true emphasis of the book. With that said, it must be remarked that—despite the absence of His name—God is the central figure of the book, as He is in all.

With the opening of the account, the reader is immediately thrust into the historical setting: “In the days of Ahasuerus” (Est. 1:1). Only liberal commentators would disagree with the identity of this man as Xerxes, for the facts to equate the two names to the same person are beyond dispute. Those interested should consider reading the *History of Herodotus* to know the character of Xerxes more fully. Nevertheless, the character of this man is presented as early as the first chapter in the matter of Vashti (Est. 1:10-12). His crude character and the scruples of the queen contrast and play an intrinsic role in the overall scheme of the book. On the request of Ahasuerus, Josephus observes:

Now the king was desirous to shew her, who exceeded all other women in beauty, to those that feasted with him, and he sent some to command her to come to his feast. But she, out of regard to the laws of the Persians, which forbid the wives to be seen by strangers, did not go the king; and though he oftentimes sent the eunuchs to her, she did nevertheless stay away, and refused to come, till the king was so much irritated, that he brake up the entertainment, and rose up, and called for those seven who had the interpretation of the laws committed to them, and accused his wife, and said, that he had been affronted by her, because that when she was frequently called by him to his feast, she did not obey him once (237).

Thus, Josephus believes the controversy to exist merely over standing laws of Persian custom rather than a matter of morality. There is little doubt that this was at least part of the problem. However, an earlier incident during the reign of Darius could well have influenced Vashti's decision. On this, Herodotus (as translated by George Rawlinson) states the events as follows:

So the Persians sent upon this errand, when they reached the court, and were brought into the presence of Amyntas, required him to give earth and water to King Darius. And Amyntas not only gave them what they asked, but also invited them to come and feast with him; after which he made ready the board with great magnificence, and entertained the Persians in right friendly fashion. Now when the meal was over, and they were all set to the drinking, the Persians said, "Dear Macedonian, we Persians have a custom when we make a great feast to bring with us to the board our wives and concubines, and make them sit beside us. Now then, as thou hast received us so kindly, and feasted us so handsomely, and givest moreover earth and water to King Darius, do also after our custom in this matter." Then Amyntas answered, "O, Persians! we have no such custom as this; but with us men and women are kept apart. Nevertheless, since you, who are our lords, wish it, this also shall be granted to you." When Amyntas had thus spoken, he bade some go and fetch the women. And the women came at his call and took their seats in a row over against the Persians. Then, when the Persians saw that the women were fair and comely, they spoke again to Amyntas and said, that "what had been done was not wise; for it had been better for the women not to have come at all, than to come in this way, and not sit by their sides, but remain over against them, the torment of their eyes." So Amyntas was forced to bid the women sit side by side with the Persians. The women did as he ordered; and then the Persians, who had drunk more than they ought, began to put their hands on them, and one even tried to give the woman next him a kiss (5:18).

There is, then, a historical reference point to which Vashti, in her mind, could refer, and because the situation was not very different than the occasion under Darius, she could anticipate the outcome well enough ahead to refuse the king's demand. This moves the issue away from a battle over customs (which is dubious, at best) to a matter of scruples, of what was decent. Still, there is the general atmosphere in which this request was made. The consumption of intoxicating beverages had been incorporated into the law system (Est. 1:8). If the greater context of the Bible may be considered, and it should here, then this occasion was nothing more than what Paul would later identify as *revelling* (Gal. 5:21), and it is without dispute that dancing, drinking, immodest dress

and sensual activities were standard among these ancient parties. Based on the tone of Esther 1, and the overall context of both history and the biblical record, it is hard to believe that the king’s command inhered only a walk-through by the queen in full attire. This was a request of indecent exposure. Whether he requested her to appear in the crown alone, meaning that the rest of her body was unclothed, remains to be seen—though many believe this is the intended interpretation. In fact, the Jewish Targum interprets the passage in this way. The point is: it was more than just breach of custom. The drunken mob, the party atmosphere, and an emphasis upon the beauty of the queen must yield a conclusion that a request of immodesty was presented her. Whether it was full nudity, partial nudity, or even the removal of a veil, these were all considered acts of indecency.

Without straying too far into the topic of ethics, the subject must at least be brought to the discussion for the full impact of the text. From whence did Vashti’s moral conscious come? Paul conveys that the existence of God alone may be known from nature, which includes those attributes implied from the creative order itself (Rom. 1:20). Since morality is objectively based, and the existence of God alone may be known from nature, then moral activity is governed by the revealed will of God. This contrast between the general revelation of God in nature and the special revelation of God in His Law should be studied carefully from the Psalm 19. While “the heavens declare the glory of God,” it is the “law of the Lord” that converts the soul (Psa. 19:1, 7). With the question of Vashti’s morality in mind, it seems appropriate here to interject God’s reminder to the younger generation on the brink of Canaan:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people. For what nation *is there so* great, who *hath* God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God *is* in all *things that* we call upon him *for*? And what nation *is there so* great, that hath statutes and judgments *so* righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deu. 4:5-8).

According to Paul, the Israel of old was much like the church insofar as the spread of God’s message was concerned (Rom. 3:2). And ques-

tions raised then regarding the morality of Vashti will ultimately find answer in the nation with whom she had been associated for some time—Israel. This is not to say that the nation of Israel was trouble free, but their captivity was (among other things) a time of spiritual restoration.

Who would deny the impact of God's people upon the Chaldeans, or the Persian Empire? There is little doubt that those involved directly in the account of Esther remember well the influence of men like Daniel and Ezekiel, from which—as far as time is concerned—the account is not too far removed. Still, in the present, there are the great leaders like Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. And with that, the point is made. Without the existence of some morality in the nation of Israel (while in captivity), what would Vashti's decision have been? Had she lacked the morality gleaned from exposure to the law of God, the account of Esther can hardly be thought to have happened as it did. Without Vashti's refusal and the incitement of the king's anger, Esther's chance to stand in the gap would not have been presented as an option. What does this speak of the need to remain moral—and of the long term effect therefrom? The morality of the people, then, acts as a silent character in the book, but nonetheless important.

Vashti is dispelled as queen, and the missing years of history to follow are supplied by Herodotus—who records the military campaign of Xerxes against Grecia (cf., Dan. 8:20-21). When the campaign is over, the search for a new queen begins, and Esther is selected (Est. 2:1-20). She is the “daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai” (Est. 2:15), making Esther and Mordecai cousins. As the account unfolds, both Esther and Mordecai appear in positions of tremendous influence: Esther as queen, and Mordecai in the “king's gate” (Est. 2:19, 21). Concerning *gates*, Smith observes that “in the ancient Near East the gate was a complex of buildings comparable to a modern day county courthouse” (694). Mordecai, therefore, served in the capacity of a judge to the people, or else more generally as a royal officer. This allowed him the opportunity to know the plot of the two chamberlains against the king (Est. 2:21-23). Working with Esther, the situation was resolved, the two conspirators hung, and Mordecai's name written in the chronicles. At the end of the second chapter, three of the four main character have been introduced to the reader: Xerxes, Esther, and Mordecai.

The third chapter supplies the fourth principle character, and the one to whom much of the story is due (for his plot): Haman. That this man

is one of the most wicked to have a name etched in Holy Writ is beyond dispute. His demeanor is nothing but vile, and the mere mention of his name brings a hiss from Jewish people—who have forever graven in their mind this account. Walter F. Adeney assesses Haman's character thus:

Haman is the Judas of Israel. Not that his conduct or his place in history would bring him into comparison with the traitor apostle, for he was an open foe and a foreigner. But he is treated by popular Judaism as the Arch-Enemy, just as Judas is treated by popular Christianity. Like Judas, he has assigned to him a solitary pre-eminence in wickedness, which is almost inhuman.... He [Haman] shares with Judas the curse of Cain. Boundless execration is heaped upon his head. Horror and hatred have almost transformed him into Satan (371).

Why not describe him as such? After all, what more could be said of a man who plots to murder an entire nation of people under the rule of Xerxes, because he is personally offended at the action of one man? In his bitter hatred of Mordecai, and desire to do harm to Mordecai's people (the Jews), Haman dupes the king into rendering a death sentence upon this nation of insurrectionists—as he described the Jews (Est. 3:7ff.). Thus, the king unwittingly grants the petition, which now places the drama into full pace.

It is not long until Mordecai knows of the scheme, most likely through his political affiliations. Perhaps judging himself too harshly, the cousin to the queen mourns in the typical ancient Near Eastern style (Est. 4:1-3). When Esther learns of his mourning, she cannot allow the situation to pass without knowing the cause. This in turn, brings the reader to the main question for consideration. Esther's attendant, Hatach, is sent to Mordecai to inquire of the reason for his grief. Mordecai relays the plot of Haman and provides the legal documentation to prove his claim; in addition, he charges Esther to approach the king—to "stand in the gap" for the Jewish people. However, Esther, knowing the penalty for entering the king's inner court without permission, relays to Mordecai that his plan to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people would result in death. Yet, as Mordecai explained, Esther too would perish in Haman's plot (Est. 4:13). Now, with context established, the full force of Mordecai's question to Esther is understood:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this? (Est. 4:14).

The security of the nation stood upon the edge of a sword, and Mordecai reminds Esther that she is in a unique position to turn the tide of events. As a matter of fact, Mordecai is sure that Jehovah will deliver the people, if not by Esther, then by someone else; he does however believe that Esther has been raised to her position of authority through the providence of God—for such a time as this. Adam Clarke captures the essence of the question in the following paraphrase: “Is it likely that Divine providence would have so distinguished thee, and raised thee from a state of abject obscurity, merely for *thy own sake*?” He adds, “Must it not have been on some *public account*? Did *he* not see what was coming? and has he not put thee in the place where thou mayest counteract one of the most ruinous purposes ever formed?” (817). Clearly then, the question regards the providential care of God for His people and contemplates Esther’s place in the Divine plan.

A QUESTION OF PROVIDENCE

Since the question of Mordecai to Esther encompasses the providential work of God, the book should be studied from this perspective. It is true that Esther provides the history of the Jews in Persia during the reign of Xerxes; but, as stated before, the book’s primary concern is God’s providence. We now turn our attention to this very item.

Regardless of the specific element considered in the Scheme of Redemption, nothing was incidental. The atoning work of the Christ (Rev. 13:8), the church (Eph. 3:9-11), the new covenant (Gal. 3:24; Rev. 14:6), conditions of pardon (1 Pet. 1:2), et cetera, were eternal in design. Hence, it should come as no surprise to the reader that in the aftermath of sin the first prophecy of the Christ is supplied (Gen. 3:15). This prophecy covers the entire span of the Christ’s work on earth, from virgin conception (“her seed”) to the resurrection from the grave (“it shall bruise thy head”). Of distinct importance here is the prophesied battle between Deity and the devil, in which the devil would attempt to thwart the work of the Christ (“thou shalt bruise his heel”) but ultimately suffer defeat. Though Satan’s efforts no doubt culminated in the death and burial of Jesus, it should not be thought that his efforts to undo God’s plan were limited to this one event. History is

replete with occasions where the wicked one sought to roadblock the Scheme of Redemption, in one form or another. Haman therefore is but one of many men to work on this wise.

The point to be gleaned from Genesis 3:15 is that God's plan to redeem man would not fail, and herein is the answer to what some consider the "mystery meaning" of Romans 8:28-39. Though efforts were made, no outside force would disrupt what God intended to accomplish. (Those who use this text in an effort to justify the false doctrine of "perseverance of the saints," also called "once saved always saved," should read the passage again; nowhere does the Bible justify such an ungodly doctrine.) The focus is God's work in the Scheme of Redemption—not man's. Paul's point then is that the plan of God was infallible and inerrant.

Before the book of Genesis closes, the seed promise has been narrowed to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and the history of the Old Testament will demonstrate time after time the deliverance provided by God to preserve the seed line of the Messiah. In every instance where the people of God are delivered from sure destruction, the seed promise must remain a prominent factor in explanation. The case of Esther is no different. Not everyone had returned to Palestine at this point, only a group with Zerubbabel. The bulk of the Jews remained in Persia during the historical time-frame of Haman's plot. Therefore, the providential work of God in Esther must be understood as relating to all of the sundry elements of the Scheme of Redemption. It is fascinating, then, to ponder the unique events of this story in relation to the whole. Though it is not entirely comprehensive, consider the following points as they relate to the providential work of Jehovah to save the Jews:

- The morality of Vashti, gleaned from exposure to the law of God
- Mordecai's raising of Esther, after her parents' death
- Ahasuerus' selection of Esther as queen
- Mordecai's position of authority in the king's gate
- Mordecai's knowledge of the plot against Xerxes, which ends in the exposure of the plot and his name inscribed in the book of the chronicles
- Mordecai obtaining a report of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews

- Esther's position of queen, which enables her a certain privilege to help the situation
- The fasting (which would most likely have included prayer) by the people on Esther's behalf
- The king granting favor to Esther, who entered his inner court without specific request of the king
- Haman's preparation of gallows, intended originally by Haman for Mordecai
- The king's insomnia
- Of all the records read to the king, the account of Mordecai's earlier actions to protect the king and his interests
- The king's inquisition to Haman about what should be done to one who had saved the king's life, and Haman's answer (not knowing the king spoke of Mordecai)
- Esther's request to the king to reverse the earlier decree, and the revealing of Haman as the one who so manipulated the king
- The king's anger which forced him from the presence of Esther and Haman, which allows him to return and find Haman in a conspicuous position
- And so on, and so on

Though there are more details than these, and some deserve better explanation than what is provided above, the point is made. Each event occurring in the book of Esther was but a part of the entire providential scheme by God to deliver the Jews from death. Everything occurred in the right time; people were in the right place; nothing could be missing. Yet, the book of Esther is worthy of study simply from the standpoint of the essential differences between miracles and providence. Note that in Esther the events worked through time, using the right people in the right places, et cetera. Whereas a miracle was direct, immediate, observable in effect, and beyond the laws of the natural universe, providence works over time, indirectly (through medium), is non-observable, and well within the laws of the natural universe. Providence is no less powerful to accomplish the will of God. Mordecai knew this fact well, and it is expressed within his statement to Esther: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place" (Est. 4:14). Even if Esther failed her duty, the work of deliverance would still be ac-

complished through other means. However, as Mordecai reasoned, how could it not be that Esther is here for this purpose?

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Taking the basic account of Esther (to which the question for consideration is attached), it is now necessary to offer some practical advice and let the book of Esther aid the saint in his/her spiritual growth and development. The reader is encouraged to perform in independent study, and glean the full amount of practical advice—since the list following will be abbreviated. Nevertheless, consider the following points (in keeping with Romans 15:4).

1. Those with wicked agendas will lie to suit their purposes.

Haman’s conversation and conduct were full of deceit (Est. 3:7-11). Even when he expressed sorrow over the exposure of his plan, the sorrow was not genuine. The point should be clear enough from the example of Haman—that those who seek to harm the Lord’s people cannot be trusted. This is evident from the many warnings presented in both Old and New Testaments. How often is the same true today? Many of the liberal agenda have proven that deceit is standard among them by providing dishonest answers to inquiries, slandering the faithful behind closed doors, denying that they have taught error when their own words prove otherwise, and such like. It is not surprising then that Jesus charged the religious intelligentsia of His day of belonging to the father of lies (John 8:44).

2. Opportunities, when realized, must be seized and used to the glory of God. It was Mordecai who surmised that an open door had been set before Esther to do good; it was therefore Esther’s duty to seize the opportunity and use it to the glory of God. This principle has been true from the dawn of time. Now this is not to say that men may know what is providential or what is not, apart from those examples in the Sacred Text. However, it is to exhort prayer from the saints to God that He would grant such doors to be opened (Col. 4:3) and that the saints would be ready to use the opportunity to do good (Rev. 3:8-12).

3. Servants of God must be always prepared for every good work. Of the many principles that receive repeated emphasis in Holy Writ, preparedness is one. In the New Testament alone, heavy stress is placed upon the need to be ready. For example, saints are to be “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21) or “ready to every good work” (Tit. 3:1), and “ready always to give an answer” (1 Pet. 3:15).

The outcome of the account of Esther would have been quite different had Mordecai (or Esther) been unprepared to do something about the insidious plot of Haman. And preparedness is implied in Mordecai's question to Esther: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?"

4. One must obey God rather than man. It is entirely possible that Ahasuerus could have passed the sentence of death upon Esther for her uninvited appearance in the inner court (Est. 4:11). The choice weighed heavy upon the queen, no doubt (Est. 4:16). Her breach of Persian law was to accomplish what was right in the plan of God, much like Peter and the apostles stated in Acts 5:29. The ideal situation would, of course, be harmony between the law of the state and the law of God (Rom. 13:1ff). This is not always the case, and it is never right to violate the law of God to the preference of civil law. With the decline of society—and at such an alarming rate—the time may come when the practice of New Testament Christianity is outlawed. What then? Would to God that, when the time comes, saints will opt for the example of Esther: "So will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16).

5. Silence is deadly. Nothing has been more evident in the last two decades than the great injury caused by silence. The book of Esther makes the point sufficiently enough. Could the account have been written as it now is if Mordecai remained quiet regarding Haman's plot? Or, what would have been the end if Esther remained silent? It is true that Mordecai was confident that deliverance would come from someone, even if Esther had refused her place in the plan; however, the point here remains unchanged: it took a voice of opposition to reverse the murderous plan of Haman. During the last two decades, what has allowed the permeation of error more than the silence of those who believe the truth? Error must be spoken against and fought against that it may be silenced, but not the truth.

6. Concern must be coupled with courage. It has been said, "It is easy to be brave from a distance." To be sure, more people talk of courage than are courageous. The account of Esther demonstrates that genuine concern toward God's cause is not shown by mere lip service, but by doing what is required—regardless of the cost. The factor that propels courageous action is the knowledge that God is with those who stand with Him. As the Psalmist recorded, "The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psa. 118:6).

7. A strong stand for God’s cause aids evangelism. Perhaps one of the most remarkable statements made in the aftermath of the entire affair is this: “And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them” (Est. 8:17). Courage and bold action against wrongdoing works in favor of conversion: not against. The pages of history are replete with proof of this truth. Even Acts reveals that the unwavering resolve of the church, in spite of persecution, worked in favor of church growth (e.g., Acts 8:3-4). Some have imagined that to be passive and agreeable to error is the best means of evangelism, that more souls can be won by avoiding all controversy. However, to what is one being converted (Mat. 23:15): the truth, or something else? Truth cannot exist without controversy, for truth is always the contradiction of error. It has already been proven that silence is deadly. Now no one should advocate that the church ought to be intentionally offensive, and attempting to embitter men toward the truth, but the church cannot refuse to fight, and still be faithful (Jude 3). Esther, as well as the book of Acts, proves that there is converting influence in being bold against error.

CONCLUSION

With the closing of Esther, another set of strokes upon the canvas of biblical history is complete. The dark strokes supplied by the wicked Haman are dark indeed, but the bright strokes provided by the providence of God are the true marvel of the painting. The vivid contrast between Haman’s plan and God’s providence shows forth the brilliance of the book and reiterates that same theme made clear in every account of Bible history: God is faithful. May Esther find its place in regular study among God’s people, and its principles be applied to the glory of God through the church.

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“IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?”

JOB 14:14

Curtis A. Cates



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INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Twenty-eighth Annual Bellview Lectures is a great one: “Great Old Testament Questions.” One of the most powerful methods of teaching is the questioning method. God used this method powerfully from the first, asking Adam and Eve, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). (God never asks for information; He asks to provoke contemplation.) Consider the powerful questions He asked Job (38-41), for example.

In the context of the reality of the problems of life and the ultimate prospects of death, the question under consideration in this chapter was asked by the noble, amazing patriarch Job. In Job 14:1-2, he had observed, “Man, that is born of a woman, Is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.” With this background, he asks the rhetorical question: “If a man die, shall he live *again*?” (Job 14:14). It

is the studied and strong conviction of this writer that Job asked a question which carries its own answer—Yes!

Death is a fact of life common to all mankind which sin brought about (1 Cor. 15:56; Gen. 2:16-17). “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). From the beginning, the story of human beings has been, “and he died” (Gen. 5:8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31; 9:29; et al.). The ratio is the same as it has always been: one death for one life.

As this discussion continues, please make no mistake about these facts. This author rejects completely and absolutely the absurd, God-denying notion that the resurrection is not taught and was not believed in the Old Testament. The adherents of neo-orthodoxy (existentialism) and other critics of Bible truth affirm falsely that the “fundamentals of the faith” evolved in the mind of man through the generations, including the very existence of God, the Sonship of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth, the vicarious suffering and death, the atoning blood, the bodily resurrection of Christ—and the general resurrection of the dead at the last day. Paul speaks of those who were characterized by being “vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” These were those perverted souls who came with perverted religion. Why? The reason is that they refused to retain God and sacred, divine Revelation (the Word) in their knowledge (Rom. 1:18-28).

Further, this writer refuses to allow the modernistic skepticism **about** what the Bible teaches to dictate to him as to what God **is** saying in His Word. The writer is not a *scholar*, and he has no desire to fit in with nor to impress those whom the world generally classifies (with some of our own *brethren*) as scholars. He is certain that many of the *scholars* will differ with the exegesis of many passages on the subject under discussion. The apostle Paul’s speaking was “not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts” (1 The. 2:4), “Nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others” (1 The. 2:6). So, to you, dear reader, the challenge is: If it be the truth, accept it; if it be error, reject it. That is your responsibility (Acts 17:11). Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., in affirming the resurrection of the body upon the Lord’s return, wrote:

Old Testament worthies were not nearly as ignorant of the spirit of man and the resurrection of the body as modernistic skeptics of current times have sought to make them.... A modern infidel like Harry M. Orlinsky (one of the RSV translators) is on public record as saying the

immortality of the soul was unknown to Old Testament personalities (299-300).

What a contrast to the modernists was the writing of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (a real craftsman, “the only American to be honored by a bust in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey,” and a person of great “moral earnestness”) in “Psalm of Life”! Several of the stanzas follow:

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not written of the soul.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral Marches to the grave.

Trust no Future, howe’er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o’erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;
Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o’er life’s solemn main
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.

(Hart 357-360)

The burden of this chapter is to answer according to God’s Revelation the question: “If a man die, shall he live *again*?” The question will be answered in the main from the Old Testament and from Job 14 (and related chapters), from which the question originates. In conclusion, the implications of the question to the lives of mankind today will be noted.

THE RESURRECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

David stated that “truly as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death” (1 Sam. 20:3). However, “If a man die, shall he live *again*?” C. D. Plum wrote, “As surely as man dies he shall live again. The word of God teaches the resurrection as

strongly as it teaches the certainty of death” (851). However, we ask, does the Old Testament give just a *glimmer* of hope—or none at all—as some persons aver? Concerning the *scholars*, Howard Horton wrote:

Scholars have expressed disappointment that so few passages in the Old Testament express unquestionable assurance of the “resurrection of the body.” A few passages will illustrate both the glimmer of hope and the faintness of the affirmation (230).

Gresham wrote:

It is generally conceived that there is little about resurrection or after-life in which the Jews called the Torah (the five books of Moses) and the Former Prophets (or historical books of the Old Testament). Death is seen as the end, the destruction of human existence.... Many feel that this general concept of death is not invalidated by those isolated accounts of individuals returning to life (25-26).

So, the question is, is the hope of the resurrection at the last day but a *faintness* or a *glimmer*, or is the resurrection totally absent (even in the immediate context of Job 14:14, as well as the broad context of the whole Old Testament)? This shall be the burden of this study.

Man Made in Image of God

Speaking to fellow Creators about man’s spiritual nature:

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 birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Solomon wrote, “He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also he hath set eternity in their heart” (Ecc. 3:11). Man’s having been created in the image of God, he shall never cease to exist; mankind is the very offspring of God (Acts 17:28-29); God is the “Father of spirits”—our immortal nature (Heb. 12:9). One might just as well talk about the annihilation of God as to talk about the cessation of a human being’s existence. Once conceived, a human being shall never cease to exist. What a powerful argument for the resurrection the eternal spirit within each of us is!

Faith in the Resurrection

Many Old Testament worthies demonstrated faith in the resurrection. Abraham believed he would be raised from the dead, for that was the very motivation for leaving Ur “to go out unto a place which he was

to receive for an inheritance...for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10; cf., Gen. 11-12). In addition, this faith is demonstrated when he offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He had told his young men: "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you [compound predicate]" (Gen. 22:5). How did he know both of them would return after he sacrificed Isaac? "Accounting that God *is* able to raise up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:17-19). This scribe rejects the idea of Gresham that the "Personal resurrection may have been entertained as a vague hope as early as the days of Abraham" (38). Would you have offered a son as a sacrifice based upon a *vague hope*, dear reader? Abraham saw God's raising his son Isaac from the dead through the eye of faith; he saw the unseen (Heb. 11:1).

In Hannah's song of thanksgiving, she prayed thus, "Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to Sheol, and bringeth up" (1 Sam. 2:6). This powerful act of God would require the resurrection of the body (cf., 1 Cor. 15:42-44). To attempt to make this symbolic and to refer to Hannah's having been barren and then having a child is far-fetched, for God did not kill the child and then give the child life. It is in the context of glorying in God's wisdom and power (1 Sam. 2:4-8).

David expected to recognize and be in the presence of his infant son in their immortal existence. He stated after his son died: "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). That we shall exist eternally is eminently true.

Ezekiel truly believed in the bodily resurrection. In the valley of dry bones when God asked the prophet: "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Eze. 37:3), the necessary implication is that Ezekiel and the nation were familiar with the fact of the bodily resurrection at the last day. Otherwise, the vision would have been completely without understanding when the bones were reattached and the sinews, flesh, and skin covered them and when breath reentered them and they lived and stood upon their feet (Eze. 37:1-14). When Ezekiel responded with "O Lord Jehovah, thou knowest," he clearly recognized God's power to raise from the dead. Of course, we recognize that God is illustrating, with the bodily resurrection, the restoration of His people as a nation after the captivity in Babylon. Nevertheless, their understanding of the vision depended upon their faith in the resurrection.

Enoch and Elijah Translated

The power of God is clearly evident in the translation of two of His greatest servants. “All the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:23-24). Not only can God raise the dead, but He is able to keep death’s powers from even touching those whom He would call to Himself. No, it is not stated concerning Enoch, “and he died”! Paul stated, “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death” (Heb. 11:5).

Elijah was translated as was Enoch. “*There appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire [likely angels], which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven,” as the sons of the prophets had earlier told Elisha (2 Kin. 2:5, 11). Both of these translations were historical reality—not myths, symbolism, nor imagination. The Jews themselves thought that Elijah was coming back during Jesus’ day (Mat. 17:10; John 1:21). God will receive all believers who are alive when Jesus reappears at the last day (1 Cor. 15:51-57; 1 The. 4:15-17). God, who could translate Enoch and Elijah, can certainly raise the dead at last. Man is immortal, the necessary implication being that the readers of Genesis and 2 Kings held the truth of eternal existence, and their same personalities would persist.

Still Alive Though in Sheol

In Exodus 3:6, God told Moses, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Of course, Abraham had died and “was gathered unto his people” (Gen. 25:8). Jacob had died and “was gathered unto his people” (Gen. 49:33). Their souls had been gathered to their righteous ancestors; death was/is not extinction, as the Sadducees held it to be. Christ stated:

But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not *the God* of the dead, but of the living (Mat. 22:31-32).

These patriarchs were very much alive in Sheol. Christ clearly affirmed the resurrection in this context thus:

But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in *the place concerning* the Bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him (Luke 20:37-38).

While Rachel was giving birth to Benjamin, "her soul was departing" (Gen. 35:18), which fact proves that the spirit is distinct from the body; her immortal nature went to Sheol, the place of departed spirits awaiting the resurrection, the realm of the unseen. Jacob believed that his son Joseph had gone to Sheol, though he thought that wild beasts had devoured his physical body: "He refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down to Sheol to my son mourning" (Gen. 37:35).

When Saul went to the "woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor" and said to her: "Bring me up Samuel," this *medium* was greatly shocked when Samuel appeared.

And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice; and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what seest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I see a god coming up out of the earth (1 Sam. 28:8-14).

Samuel asked Saul why he "disquited me, to bring me up?" (1 Sam. 28:15). Saul knew that Samuel was yet alive and fully conscious; how otherwise could this historical event have taken place? Samuel was disturbed at having been called by Saul from Sheol, again to be involved in things pertaining to the earth.

Some Raised Bodily in Old Testament Times

The Old Testament records no less than three persons who were literally, actually raised from the dead. Elijah prayed to God concerning the dead son of the widow of Zarephath: "O Jehovah my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (1 Kin. 17:21-22), proving to the mother that Elijah was "a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth" (17:24). There was no question about the boy's death; the mother accused Elijah of being there for the purpose of and having slain her son (17:18). Additionally, the spirit entered back again into the body of the boy, and he revived.

When the child of the Shunammite woman

was dead, and laid upon his bed. He [Elisha] went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto Jehovah. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon him; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house once to and fro; and went up, and

stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes (2 Kin. 4:32-37).

Then again, the Bible records that a corpse was cast “into the sepulchre of Elisha: and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet” (13:21). Of course, these who were raised from the dead would die again, as would those raised upon the event of Christ’s crucifixion: Lazarus, Dorcas, et al. However, those raised (all the dead) at the last day shall never die again, just as Christ was raised never to die again.

Prophecies of Christ’s Bodily Resurrection

Many of the prophecies in the Old Testament predicted Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Psalm 16:10 states, “For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; Neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.” Peter by inspiration said in Acts 2:23-28 that this prophecy was of Christ’s being raised from the dead—see also Acts 13:28-39.

Christ, God’s suffering Servant, was “cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke *was due*. And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death” (Isa. 53:7-12), but “he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand” (Isa. 53:10). The exaltation of Christ would **require** the bodily resurrection.

Hosea spoke of Christ thus:

Come, and let us return unto Jehovah; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him (6:1-2).

This seems to be a figure of the resurrection of Christ on the third day (Luke 24:44-46) and of Christ’s being “the firstfruits of them that are asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20), which first fruits symbolize the general harvest at the Lord’s second appearing (Heb. 9:28). Of course, the very first prophecy in the Bible, Genesis 3:15, requires the resurrection of Christ—the bruising of the head of Satan (cf., Rom. 1:4).

The General Resurrection at the Last Day

The Old Testament gives numerous references and prophecies of the resurrection from the dead. In the Psalms is David’s prayer: “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with *beholding* thy form” (17:15). Note the contrast with the wicked, “whose portion is in *this* life” (17:14). Compare this with

Psalm 73:24: “Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.” The psalmist would receive honor and glorious blessings after this life is over, in heaven, necessitating the resurrection. Even death would not end his relationship with God but rather intensify it. On the other hand, the wicked seem to prosper here, but death and the resurrection of both the good and the evil reverse the situations (Luke 16:19-31). Note also Psalm 49:15: “But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; For he will receive me.” God would rescue his soul (and our souls) from Sheol. How? Does this not argue for life after death and for the resurrection?

Further, Isaiah prophesies of the resurrection. “He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces” (Isa. 25:8). This is the Hebrew perfect tense, “Jehovah will.” Schep says, “His future eschatological actions are the subject of the whole passage... ‘He will swallow up death for ever...’” (51). “Because this passage speaks so clearly to resurrection, some critics have suggested that it is an interpolation added at a later time when the doctrine of resurrection had become more dominant in Jewish thought” (Gresham 31). Note the evident connection of Isaiah’s prophecy to Paul’s statement: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). Again, “Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is *as* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead” (Isa. 26:19). It could as well be translated *my dead body*; however, it may be speaking collectively of the dead. Dew, “the symbol of life-giving power,” would be speaking to raising those corpses that are in the dust (Schep 55). Israel was mourning over their righteous dead; this action and Isaiah 25:8 provided great comfort. Notice that the identity of the body would remain the same—“**my** dead body(ies).” The spirit that returns to God at death (Ecc. 12:7) shall be reunited with its own body at death (cf., 1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Even further, Daniel prophesied of the general resurrection.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (12:2-3).

The *many* that shall awake can mean all (Rom. 5:15-19). It suggests the great multitude of all the dead. This is the ultimate reward awaiting the

righteous and faithful Jews during the period of the Maccabeans—and all the righteous of all the ages. As relates to the punishment of the wicked, compare Matthew 10:28, Luke 16:19-31, Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 21:8, et al.

The Judgment at the Last Day

The Old Testament clearly warns man of the coming and final judgment. Job warned his three *friends*, “Be ye afraid of the sword: For wrath *bringeth* the punishments of the sword, That ye may know there is a judgment” (19:29). He knew that there would be a time after his death when he would “come before him [God]” (13:16). Because of his Mediator (Christ), he would stand before God face to face, but “not as a stranger” (19:26-27). He was very much aware that God is going to rise up against the wicked in judgment (31:14). Solomon urged the young man to rejoice in his youth: “But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecc. 11:9). Appearing at the throne of God at the judgment requires the resurrection of the body. Note the Scriptures which speak of the “last day,” including the resurrection and the judgment (John 11:24; 6:44; 12:48; 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 15:50-52; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Phi. 3:20-21; et al.). “There shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).

“IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?”

With this tremendous background of evidence from the Old Testament Scriptures, let us now concentrate upon the question which Job asked. There is no doubt **at all** in this writer’s mind that the patriarch Job realized that he had an immortal nature—that he would never cease to exist. Where is even a shade of an idea that Job’s righteous children did not live on, that they were annihilated like his animals that died. (When God doubled all that Job had, notice that he **did not** give Job twenty more children—for he still had his first ten children, who were already with the Lord.) Had he not believed in the immortality of the soul, why would he ask: “Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bare me?” (3:11). He knew that his spirit was placed by God into his body at the point of conception and that it was not his breath or his biological nature. He also knew that his spirit would eventually go into the place of departed spirits—Sheol (7:9)—from which he would not return to this earthly existence (7:10). He further knew that he would come before God in judgment after he is killed (he thinks by God, actually by Satan) and was determined that, when he stands before

God, "That a godless man shall not come before him" (13:16). In fact, he reaches out to a Redeemer who would plead his case before God (13:18-19). Because of these and other reasons, this author absolutely rejects the idea suggested by most commentators that Job has despaired of a resurrection; man is no better off than a dead tree, they say (14:7-12). If the hope of man is expressed in this statement, "So man lieth down and riseth not," then he is of all men most miserable! However, when the heavens are dissolved, men shall "awake" and "be roused out of their sleep" (14:12)!

Job goes on to affirm, in answer to his most vital question, that he will have a *release* from death. "Thou [God] wouldest call, and I would answer thee: Thou wouldest have a desire to the work of thy hands" (14:14-15). God would get over His wrath (Job thinks God is angry with him) against Job, and He "wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!" (14:13). He would then raise Job out of Sheol. God would want again to see Job, whom He had fashioned as clay (10:9). Unlike the wicked, Job expected to be "gathered to *his fathers*" (27:20; compare this statement to that about the patriarchs). Yes indeed, because of the God-man (Job's Kinsman and Redeemer) (16:18-21), he would see his dear heavenly Father in judgment, *for himself*, "And mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger" (19:26-27).

CONCLUSION

The thesis of this chapter has been the study of the general resurrection at the last day, especially as seen in the Old Testament. It was not a fleeting idea or a vague wish. The evidence from the Old Testament is powerful, and it is fully corroborated in the New Testament (which must be left to a separate study). May our faith be strengthened in the sacred revelation of God, which began in the Garden of Eden and continued until the perfect law of liberty was completed and written in the Holy Book Divine!

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“HOW THEN CAN MAN BE JUSTIFIED WITH GOD?”

JOB 25:4

Clifford Newell, Jr.



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INTRODUCTION

Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, Dominion and fear *are* with him, he maketh peace in his high places. Is there any number of his armies? and upon whom doth not his light arise? How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean *that is* born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, *that is* a worm? and the son of man, *which is* a worm? (Job 25:1-6).

This short reply of Bildad, the Shuhite, brings to a close what the three friends of Job had to say. It is an interesting fact that Zophar did not attempt to answer Job this third time. And Bildad does not attempt to meet the appeals which Job had made to the facts in his case or reply to his arguments. Bildad's speech is evidently that of one who felt that he must say something, but who did not know how to meet or answer Job. Many there are who feel they have to say something, rather than having something to say!

THE CONTEXT

Understanding the context is paramount to the question raised. The question is asked: “How then can man be justified with God?” Bildad argues for the majesty or sovereignty of God in comparison to man's insignificance. The Lord's armies are numberless. His light is the sun,

and it is experienced upon earth. The idea seems to be that His providence rules over all; He is universal. As a result He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends His rain on the just and the unjust. With this background and understanding, what is man in comparison but a worm; thus, this question concerning man, a lowly creature. How can this lowly one be just before his Maker? It may be asked, with what shall a man be justified with God? Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar could not answer the question. The religious world has no clue as to how or with what shall miserable man be justified with God? Edward T. Hiscox stated, "Justification is solely through faith in Christ" (Hiscox 62). We would ask why anyone of reasonable intelligence can not understand that "solely by faith" is exclusive. Even some among the Lord's church have and are teaching false positions regarding man's justification. It stands written, "It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation" (Shelly 3). One popular writer stated, "For me, for years, Christianity was a moral code. It is now becoming a love affair. For years there were rules and regulations, now, it's a relation" (Lucado).

JUSTIFICATION

The importance of this question becomes of significance when viewed from the religious world. The case is that justification has not been understood by the religious world nor by some brethren. By *justification* we mean justified which is a legal term of "not guilty."

This action of God flows from His marvelous character! Justification is the affirmation, on the part of God, of the right standing between a formerly alienated person and Himself. It does not, of itself, indicate character or conduct. It simply suggests that the person justified is in an approved relationship with God. The word itself does not show whether such a person has always been innocent, or has been pardoned. It simply denotes the present relationship of the individual to the Father (Woods 333).

McClintock and Strong write:

Justification is a forensic term equivalent to acquittal, and opposed to condemnation; in an apologetic sense it is often synonymous with vindication or freeing from unjust imputation of blame (1102).

One writer stated, "Behind the term justification we see a courtroom scene. God the judge is sitting at the bar, man the criminal stands before

him, hopelessly guilty" (Waddey 326). Thus, according to McClintock and Strong, justification designates:

The judicial act of God by which he pardons all the sins of the sinner who believes in Christ, receiving him into favor, and regarding him as relatively righteous, not withstanding his past actual unrighteousness (1102).

JUSTIFICATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

All the writers of the New Testament built on the Old Testament. The case is established regarding Abraham.

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

The peerless Paul quotes this:

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Rom. 4:3).

Moses penned:

Cursed *be* he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deu. 27:26).

In the New Testament it states:

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal. 3:10).

The Psalmist declared:

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified (Psa. 143:2).

Again the New Testament says:

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

The prophets as well employed the practical works of righteousness for justification. Observe:

He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Mic. 6:8).

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions

from us. Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him (Psa. 103:8-13).

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed *each other* (Psa. 85:10).

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities (Isa. 53:11).

MAN'S NEED FOR JUSTIFICATION

Justification cannot be fully appreciated nor understood without a full realization of man's condition before His God. It all began in the beautiful garden setting, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and acted on their own volition. Therefore, the Scriptures saith, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom. 3:10, 23). This was God's verdict regarding mankind. The Old Testament presented sin in the following way:

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Eze. 18:20).

Isaiah concluded:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Paul argued, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Here is man in a condemned condition, a condition that he brought on himself. Thus, man has no means of setting himself free. He is as Jeremiah proclaimed: "O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

HOW THEN CAN MAN BE JUSTIFIED WITH GOD?

We would to God that every person would be concerned about being justified by God. This matter of justification in the Old Testament is important and is asked more than once. Thus, we suggest that man

never was fully justified under the Old Covenant. By this we mean, that justification presupposes the blood of Christ, as the pure innocent one, who died for mankind purchasing him by the shedding of blood. It is stated as though he received justification at that time but not in reality, because it took the sacrifice of Christ to complete and fully satisfy the demands of sins. Taylor wrote, “Were one never to sin he would be justified by his sinless perfection. The case is that the Jew nor the Gentile has done or can justify self” (79). As just stated, there are only two ways that man can be justified: by perfect obedience, or by grace through faith. It is in harmony with the entire teachings of the Bible that justification has always been by grace through faith! Rex Turner, Sr., stated:

Thus the Son of God interposed his blood in behalf of man. When man (all men, as a matter of fact) was under the sentence of death, Christ provided a means of escape from that sentence of death. He satisfied the demands of violated justice. He so propitiated the majesty of heaven and secured for man the divine favor of the high and exalted Godhead so that men could return to God through the blood of Christ (204).

How was there justification under the Old Covenant? The answer lies in the fact that justification was rendered in anticipation of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Since the death of Christ and resulting therefrom, justification became available to lost humanity in its absolute sense. The shed blood of Jesus Christ fulfilled the demands of violated justice (sin), enabling mankind to enjoy the benefits of being justified. Under the Old Testament justification was linked to the blood of Christ. When He died, His pure and precious blood reached backward or flowed backward all the way to Adam and continues to extend forward in scope until the end of time. As Paul proclaimed:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God (Rom. 3:24-25).

Lipscomb wrote:

The blood of bulls and goats under the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations possessed efficacy only in pointing to and connected with the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses from all sin, and that the partial and temporary justification became complete only when Christ came (77).

As a result of Jesus Christ's vicarious death, those called under the Old Testament came into full possession of justification when the blood of Christ was offered.

The blood sacrifices offered under the Old Covenant pointed to the direction of the ultimate and supreme sacrifice of Christ, who would endure the cross and thus bear the sins of the whole world. Winters contended:

Those under the OT system offered animal sacrifice typical of the death of Christ, as a partial or temporary measure until the promised seed should come to make the ultimate sacrifice, which would finally and completely purge from sin. The blood of animals could not take away sins (Heb. 9:11-22; 10:1-4), then, now, or ever. It only pointed forward to the sacrifice which would be truly efficacious. If sins could have been forgiven without the death of Christ, then Christ died in vain—His death was unnecessary. But the fact is, no sins were finally or absolutely forgiven until Christ died. His blood flowed backward (to all those who had obeyed God's plan) as well as forward. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can atone for sins, nothing can pay man's sin debt, but the blood of Christ. Of course, those who trusted God and did His will under the OT had the promise of forgiveness—it was in promise rather than in fact. Forgiveness was therefore as sure as God's promise (44-45).

A point that one needs to keep in mind regarding justification in the Old Testament is that, even though it is often stated as if one had received it in fact, it could never be fully received until the coming of Christ and the sacrificing of His blood. Rex Turner observed:

A pertinent observation to be underscored at this point in the study of blood, or why blood, is that the blood of animals sacrificed in worship to Jehovah could not make the worshipper perfect as pertained to his conscience. The blood sacrificed at best was typical, partial, and temporary in its cleansing. The blood sacrifices served to emphasize how the Christ had interposed his own physical blood as an atonement for the sins of Adam and Eve, and all mankind as well. Thus, the offering of the blood of animals could procure for the worshipper that necessary respite until, in God's own good time, Christ should come to earth as a man, born of a woman who had no sexual intercourse with man, and in turn die in the place of man. Within this context the author of Hebrews wrote: "...apart from shedding of blood there is no remission"; but he continued by stating that "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 9:22; 10:4) (203).

CASE STUDIES

The New Testament affirms:

Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39).

The point to be stressed is the Scriptures unequivocally conclude that one could not be justified by the law of Moses. However, the first part of the previous verse introduces Christ and those that believe (obey) Him are justified. This contemplates that under the Old Testament it was promised, but would not become official until Christ died and shed His atoning blood, which would indeed reach back to include those who died in obedience to the law they were under. Thus, man was justified in anticipation of the sacrificial death of Christ, whom then justified man in its absolute sense.

The Sacred Scriptures teach: "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). In regards to the life of Abraham, God called him and he obediently responded to that call. Had he been called and refused to obey God, would he have been counted righteous? His faith required obedience to the law. The blessing of justification for Abraham was based on a system of faith and obedience.

Moses, the great servant of Jehovah, was justified by God. How? Hebrews records:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them (Heb. 11:23-28).

Matthew records that Moses is in the setting and scene when Jesus was transfigured (Mat. 17:1-4). With the abundance of material regarding Moses, we conclude he was justified by God. How? It occurred in anticipation of Christ's supreme sacrifice and Moses' obedience.

Lot, the righteous one, was justified by God. The records states:

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;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:7-9).

Lot was righteous and through or by that principle was justified.

Noah, the patient one, was justified by God. “And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:5). In verse 9 a conclusion is drawn from the verses immediately before. The case is the Lord knows how to deliver His servants, in this instance Noah and Lot. Thus, we see the righteous principle, justification by obedience in anticipation.

Rahab, the harlot, was justified by God. The Scriptures teach:

Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house *was* upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way. And the men said unto her, *We will be* blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold, *when* we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father’s household, home unto thee. And it shall be, *that* whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood *shall be* upon his head, and we *will be* guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head, if *any* hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. And she said, According unto your words, *so be* it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window (Jos. 2:15-21).

The scarlet thread in the window is a case that no doubt symbolized blood. James states, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way?” (Jam. 2:25).

CONCLUSION

In the matter of justification, a principle that must be respected involves the shedding of the pure and precious blood of the Son of God, and this is the only way to meet the ultimate and actual demands of violated justice. Thus the Son of God interposed His blood on behalf of

man. He literally gave His life for the life of man. When man was under a sentence of death (all men are under such), Christ provided a means of escape from the sentence of death. He satisfied the demands of violated justice. He so propitiated the majesty of heaven and secured for man the divine favor of the exalted Godhead that man could return to God through the blood of Christ. Hence, Peter could write:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as silver and gold*, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

Paul instructed the Romans:

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (Rom. 5:9-11).

Paul also affirmed, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). And thus, that is why "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). How then can man be justified with God? In the pages of Holy Writ we read, "*It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:33-34). Therefore, the Christian is justified before Deity by or through the principle of obedience. In Job's case, he was justified in anticipation of Christ's shed blood!

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“WILL HE ESTEEM THY RICHES?”

JOB 36:19

Preston Silcox



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INTRODUCTION

As one examines the entirety of the scene from which the question of Job 36:19 comes, he sees a man suffering not only from the stings of Satan, but also from the false accusations of three men who claim to know all about the circumstances of the patriarch's problems. These men have each taken turns charging Job with crimes of which he was not guilty. The philosophy to which these three remain dedicated, demands that Job is suffering at the hand of God as a direct result of terrible transgressions he must have committed in the face of God. Job, however, maintains that he is innocent of the charges and that God must be punishing him unjustly. Elihu, a fourth disputant, now enters the picture with a slightly different approach than his condemning counterparts and the struggling sufferer.

Rather than falsely accusing the patriarch of improvable sins, Elihu focuses on things Job had said in the discussion, and brings to light his “disposition and attitude toward God which were wrong” (Hailey 329). Elihu recognizes that Job and his first three accusers defend their particular positions to the point of wrongly accusing God, and thus he sets out to expose their crimes and to defend the Creator. It is from the midst of this distinct discourse that the question under consideration comes. Elihu asks, “Will he esteem thy riches?” As quickly as he poses the question, he proclaims the answer: “No, not gold, nor all the forces

of strength.” Elihu had just warned Job that a great ransom could not deliver him from the stroke of God’s chastening hand (Job 36:18). The sufferer’s only hope is repentance. Elihu now simply emphasizes the point by stating that no amount of material wealth can win God’s favor, and no amount of earthly power can fend off God’s wrath!

While Elihu’s question consists of only a few words, it speaks volumes about the deceitfulness of riches and the dangers of might. Likewise, it declares a great deal about the necessity of spiritual uprightness, along with a proper view of self. Finally, among other things, this question says much about the grand and just nature of God. These items of interest, each gained from Job 36:19, make up the rest of this chapter.

THE WEAKNESS OF WEALTH

Elihu’s question assured Job that God could not be bargained with, bought off, or bribed with the riches of this world. Of course, Job knew this point well, and at no time did he attempt use his wealth to circumvent what he believed to be God’s judgments. In fact, at the very outset of his trials, this great patriarch confessed: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (1:21). Unlike this righteous rich man, however, many fall prey to the deceitfulness of riches; these fool themselves into believing that earthly wealth is some permanent source of power. Such a distorted view overlooks the many shortcomings of this world’s temporal treasures.

Plenty of Warning

By means of His inspired Word, God repeatedly cautions His creation about the weakness of wealth. For example, He warns that earthly fortunes are fleeting. Proverbs 23:5 says that “*riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” No wonder the apostle Paul warns: “Them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in **uncertain** riches” (1 Tim. 6:17).

Similarly, Jesus cautions that the riches of this realm are perishable: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” (Mat. 6:19). The wise person takes such warnings seriously, setting his “affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). By doing such, he lays up for himself “treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Mat. 6:20).

While 1 Timothy 6:17 mentioned above cautions man about the uncertainty of worldly wealth, it also warns against the false sense of security that sometimes comes along with riches. Paul concedes that some **"trust in uncertain riches."** Along this very line, Psalm 52:7 speaks of one who "trusted in the abundance of his riches" and Proverbs 18:11 cautions against a general rule of the rich person: his "wealth *is* his strong city." Consider such warnings in light of Psalm 49:6-7: "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None *of them* can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." These cautionary words sound very similar to Elihu's warning to Job!

While humanity might rush onward in its quest of material gain, God clearly cautions that the temporal treasures of this life are weak at best. Men would do well to carefully consider where on their lists of priorities they place this world's goods. Wealth has not the power to merit God's favor, nor is it potent enough to purchase the soul out of judgment.

Watch Your Step!

When warnings from God such as those noted above are not heeded, men with material gain on their minds place themselves in harm's way. Paul describes the dangers as follows:

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

Those entrapped by the piercing sorrows of materialism vary in degree and in kind. Consider some of these who ignore the warning signs and fall prey to the risks of riches.

Some entangle themselves in the belief that they are the sole sources of their temporal treasures. This writer knows of one man who refused to give God thanks for a meal that was set before him. Pridefully, he reasoned and boasted that he himself worked by the sweat of his brow to earn the money that purchased the food. The arrogant and unthankful man foolishly charged that God did not work for the meal, so God should not be thanked for it. Jesus describes this man's New Testament counterpart in Luke 12:16-21:

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

Repeatedly, this foolish farmer viewed himself as the sole source of his blessing and planned for no one and nothing but himself. He spoke of *my barns*, *my fruit*, and *my goods*. He failed to realize that all things belong to God and that he was but a steward of the blessings. Truly, “The earth *is* the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa. 24:1).

Additionally, some fall into a pit of pragmatism, measuring God’s favor with them by the amount of riches they have. They reason that the more they have, the more God must be pleased with them. No doubt, this was a part of the problem with the Laodicean congregation. Notice this church’s self-evaluation: “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). Even though they apparently believed that they were still in favor with God, Christ described their real condition as being “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (3:17). Their material prosperity was no indication of their spiritual prosperity. In fact, the psalmist witnessed the “prosperity of the wicked” (Psa. 73:3). Both the righteous and the unrighteous would do well to remember that God makes the “sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Mat. 5:45).

Finally, among others who ignore God’s warnings about wealth, some stumble into the tempting trap of believing that riches are the answer to all of life’s problems and the supreme pathway to true happiness. Jesus dismisses this view in the preface to His story of the foolish farmer noted above. There, the Lord warns, “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). Recently, this writer heard a man arguing that *things* make people happy. To prove his position, the man cited the reaction of children when they receive gifts and went on to confess that he himself revels in his own material things. While few doubt that the treasures of this life bring pleasure, most fail

to admit that the happiness gained is only temporary. Moses, however, realized that the pleasures acquired through the things of this world are only *seasonal* (Heb. 11:25). With this knowledge, he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Heb. 11:24) and esteemed "the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Heb. 11:26). Solomon was right when he said of the treasure hunter, "Neither is his eye satisfied with riches" (Ecc. 4:8).

Get It Right

Lest someone misunderstand the foregoing material, the Scriptures declare that "the **love** of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10), not the mere possession of riches. While it may be difficult for a wealthy man to enter into the kingdom of God, it is not impossible (cf., Mark 10:24-27). So long as the man of wealth possesses the riches and the riches do not possess the man, such a person of affluence can please God. Both rich and poor alike must remember the proper order of priorities—that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Like Paul, let all who follow the Christ learn to be content in whatsoever state they find themselves, knowing both how to be abased and how to abound (Phi. 4:11-12). Truly, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Pro. 11:4).

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

Another point Elihu stresses to Job is that the might of man, like his money, will not prevent God from executing His will. Along with its answer, notice again the question under consideration: "Will he esteem thy riches? *no*, not gold, **nor all the forces of strength**" (Job 36:19). This particular portion of Elihu's answer and the context of the question as a whole, point to God's unquestionable greatness, His unparalleled power. Consider the following material in light of this timeless truth.

Who's In Charge Here, Anyway?

The Scriptures overflow with examples of those who believed they were greater than God and not accountable for their behavior. The lives and actions of such people demonstrate the foolishness of pride and lend credence to the notion that when it comes to humans, power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The Pharaoh to whom God sent Moses and Aaron as ambassadors stands out as an example of corrupted power coupled with ignorance and stubbornness. These terrible traits display themselves especially in

Exodus 5:2. Upon hearing the divine message, “Let my people go,” the cruel king responds, “Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.” This man of worldly might—this one who exercised cruel and calloused dominion over God’s chosen people—learned the hard way that his strength was no match for the Lord’s and that his power could not stay the just hand of Jehovah!

One finds a similar sad example in Nebuchadnezzar, the self-loving leader of Babylon. Notice his arrogant estimation of the kingdom over which he reigned: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). His statement—filled with self-exalting personal pronouns—soon haunted him as God humbled the king until he knew that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men” (Dan. 4:32). Notice Proverbs 21:1 in light of this context: “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.” None of Nebuchadnezzar’s earthly forces—authority, riches, and might—could stop the righteous reprimand of God!

Another illustration of prideful power is Herod Agrippa I. Acts 12 recounts his executing James and his attempt to do the same to Peter. The chapter closes with his accepting blasphemous flattery from those of Tyre and Sidon. In response to an oration the tetrarch gave from his throne, the people proclaimed, “*It is* the voice of a god, and not of a man” (Acts 12:22). The divine discipline he then received should warn all that the might of man pales in comparison to the greatness of God: “And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:23).

Multitudes of men believe they can topple the just actions of God with their own might. Perhaps not all of them possess great power by the world’s standards, but all rebellions against God’s perfect Will—seditions of the strong and weak alike—display a supposed authority that no human has a right to claim. Any time one opposes the Law of the Lord, in word or action, he demonstrates a belief that his own will is superior to God’s. Unfortunately, too many shall learn this fact far too late. Consider the scene which the apostle John was permitted to see and record:

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life:

and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

Young and old, low and high, rich and poor, weak and mighty shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ: "none [are] so great as to avoid the jurisdiction of this court" (Henry).

Honor To Whom Honor Is Due

To the dismay of the money lover and to the disappointment of the power-hungry, God is, always has been, and forever shall be in control. While this fact may disturb the ungodly, the righteous rejoice in it. They find in Him one on Whom they can cast their care and One in Whom they can place their trust.

God is the supreme source of man's possessions and the divine distributor of man's power: "Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all" (1 Chr. 29:12). With similar language, Solomon penned that "God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour" (Ecc. 5:19). Though some abuse the possessions and positions over which they are stewards, the fact remains that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift that man has the opportunity to enjoy (cf., Jam. 1:17). He is the Creator of life itself and the Sustainer of the same: God

giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation (Acts 17:25-26).

The Scriptures portray a great contrast between the various vessels of false trusts and the one object of true trust. For example, concerning the danger of placing total confidence in riches, remember again the warning of 1 Timothy 6:17: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, **but in the living God**, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." As for placing blind assurance in the earthly might of men—whether it be the power of self or the strength of others—notice the words of Psalm 118:9: "*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.*" Those who desire spiritual wealth and godly strength would do well to heed Proverbs 3:5-10:

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct

thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

The faithful fully understand that the power and righteousness of the Almighty make Him totally trustworthy: “*Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!*” (Psa. 31:19). May the redeemed rejoice always in the greatness of God!

CONCLUSION

As the thoughts of this chapter come to a close, consider a response that Job gave to Elihu’s question before the young theologian ever posed the query of 36:19:

If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, *Thou art my confidence*; If I rejoiced because my wealth *was* great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking *in* brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also *were* an iniquity *to be punished by* the judge: for I should have denied the God *that is* above (31:24-28).

These noble and telling words describe a man who knew well that God does not esteem the riches or respect the might of men; they reveal a character whose actions remind the faithful to place trust in the giving and great God that is above!

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“WHAT IS MAN THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM?”

PSALM 8:4

Darrell Broking



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INTRODUCTION

Psalms 8 is a powerful poem bursting forth with praise, glory, and honor for God. This psalm begins and ends with the same magnificent words: “O LORD our Lord, how excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!” There is absolutely no doubt that Psalm 8 is part of the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Nothing else explains how David knew about the paths of the seas ages before “enlightened man” came to that understanding on his own. Since the Hebrews writer visited David’s psalm of praise (Heb. 2:6-9), it is sometimes assumed that Psalm 8:4 is dealing with the Messiah. However, Psalm 8 is looking at the special place of man in light of the Divine creation.

Imagine the young shepherd boy David attending to the family flock under the midnight skies of Palestine. Those pristine night skies, illuminated by the handiwork of the Almighty God of creation, provided the impetus for the pen of the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1). David stood in awe under the work of God’s fingers. Acknowledging the might and power of the “LORD our Lord,” David declared, “How excellent *is* thy name in all the earth!” (Psa. 8:1). How true it is that “the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psa. 19:1). Furthermore, “The invisible things of him

from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20). Instead of foolishly turning away from the only answer to the creation of all that exists, David acknowledged the awesomeness of God and the power of His might!

In light of the creation, David asked the questions of our study: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Psa. 8:4). These questions are among the greatest questions of the Bible, and they will be the focus of this study. It is a wise man that will search through the inspired annals of Scripture seeking to answer David’s questions. To that end attention is now given.

WHAT IS MAN?

While the book of Job is probably the oldest book in the Bible, in the collation of the inspired canon Moses was given the honor of hanging the first star in the firmament of Scripture, the great tabernacle of truth. Moses recorded the fact that the earth was created three days before the other heavenly bodies. Look out into the vast expanse of all that exists, if it can be done, and notice that out of all the planets it was the earth that God created and formed to be inhabited (Isa. 45:18). The beautiful garden of Eden must have radiated with the glory of God. All provisions to sustain life were delicately planned out and instilled into the creation by Almighty God. One of the amazing facts of creation is that the first five days of it were used to prepare the earth for the arrival of man. No wonder David asked: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

Man is a free moral agent, created by God for His glory. The Bible testifies to the omniscience of God. As the all-knowing one, God knew that the man He was about to create would err from the holy commandment delivered to him (McClish 160-180).¹ Those who say otherwise limit the omniscience of God. Accordingly, before the foundation of the world God had a plan to save man in Christ (Eph. 1:4). So why did God create man knowing that man would sin? The answer is that God is desirous of fellowship with kindred spirits “characterized by free holiness; and there can be no holiness in the absence of free will” (Turner 83).² Therefore, God created man in His own image! What is man? Imagine the concept. Man is a being created by God, a Divine source

beyond man's ability to fully comprehend, because God wanted to fellowship with man!

The Bible says that God created man in His image; it does not say that man created God. Yet, many allege, by their actions and conduct, that God is like man. Sadly, many in the church of Christ are like many of those in the world in this regard. No wonder the Bible is replete with information attesting to the fact that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). Men often feel that they are so special that God will ultimately justify all of their doings. Men, confident that God will excuse them, even though the Bible clearly condemns their actions, commit sins of all kinds. Hence, the false idea that man created God in his own image. The fact of the matter is that man is special, because God created him to fellowship both now and in eternity. However man is not so special that God fellowships him while he is still in the gutters of sin.

HOW IS GOD MINDFUL OF MAN?

In six literal 24-hour days, God created this world. Six times during the creation week God looked upon His work and saw that "it was good." After the sixth day, God looked and saw that "it was very good." When God calls something good, be assured, it is good. After viewing the biblical imagery of Eden, and looking upon the world's current beauty, one can only imagine how wonderfully awesome heaven will be. Some amazing things happened in Eden's paradise. Those events reveal love, devotion, compassion, rejection, denial, disobedience, fear, and mercy. Through a study of the fall of man one can receive greater insight into the fact that God is mindful of man.

The Lord God created man and placed him in paradise (Gen. 2:7-8). Every need of man was provided for in the garden (Gen. 2:9, 16-17). After creating the woman, the Bible indicates that Adam and Eve were perfectly unashamed in paradise (Gen. 2:18-24). Because of man's free moral agency, man was prohibited to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told man, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The common way to interpret Genesis 2:17 is to look at passages like Isaiah 59:1-2, James 1:14-15, and James 2:24, and say that, since death is separation and sin separates one from God, the word *die* in Genesis 2:17 means "spiritual death." Readers of the Scriptures delivered after Adam's day should understand that sin separates men from God. But what did Adam understand God

to mean when God told Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit he would surely die?

The death promised in Genesis 2:17 conveys an idea broader than that of spiritual death alone. The Hebrew word translated “die” in Genesis 2:17 means: “To die, to be slain, to make to die” (Wilson 123).³ God promised man that execution would be the result of sin. In fact, the clause under consideration from Genesis 2:17 can be rendered “dying ye shall die.” No wonder Adam was afraid and hid from his Creator in the garden. Imagine the thought of immediate execution, and since the sting of death is sin (1 Cor. 15:56), banishment into that place prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41).

WHAT IS HELL GOING TO BE LIKE?

In May 1902, Joseph Ludger was in jail in the city of St. Pierre, on the beautiful paradise like island of Martinique. Ludger had been locked in jail for some trivial offense, but he managed to escape, only to be captured and confined in one of the city’s strong underground cells. On the fatal morning of May 8, 1902, a volcano destroyed the island of Martinique. That morning Martinique’s capital city, St. Pierre, had a population of 33,000 people, but, when the sun went down that evening, in a fury of strange flame, the entire 33,000 were reported dead. Later it was learned that a few people survived the eruption, one of whom was Joseph Ludger.

St. Pierre was so devastated that metal melted and ran in the streets like molten wax; yet Ludger was alive! After 81 days of hospitalization, Ludger told the world his story. He said that he heard a strange and incomprehensible noise—“a noise composed of all noises”—“an immense and terrible uproar.” An intense and unbearable heat came through the fort like masonry of the cell. Ludger’s clothes did not catch fire, but his flesh began to blister. He knelt to pray, but the stones of his cell burned his knees. He fell upon his back, but the hot flags scorched his flesh. He beat upon the bars of iron, only to have his hands seared.

All that day and night Ludger moaned and cried and beat with blistered hands at the burning bars. No food, no water, no comfort came to him through all those slow hours of parching agony. Sinners, know this: when the eruption of God’s wrath shall burst out upon your guilty soul, there will be no hope for you! After a billion ages, you may still beat with blistered hands on the burning gates of hell, but they will never open to let you out. On its hot and molten pavement you will find

no place to pray. The thundering of the wrath of an insulted God will rumble through the inky blackness and mournfully mingle with the wail of your agonizing lamentation.

WHEN GOD CALLED ADAM THAT DAY, WHAT WENT THROUGH ADAM'S MIND?

Paradise quickly became the garden of fear. Adam's creator, benevolent provider, and his great friend was now the object of his fear (Gen. 3:8). With the cool evening breeze rustling through the trees, and the wonders of another colorful sunset, God's voice was heard in the garden but received in a new way by man. What do you suppose ran through Adam's mind as he heard God's voice? Did Adam's knees tremble? Did his teeth chatter together? Did Adam's inward parts feel as if they would explode at any moment? Was the one overwhelming thought in Adam's mind the thought that now he was going to meet with a cruel violent death, as his executioner was summoning him? Adam's paradise erupted into the garden of fear and dread. Why did God not execute Adam and Eve right there on the spot? Since God did not execute the guilty, how is it that He can be just and righteous? The answer to these questions helps one to truly understand that God is mindful of man.

One can infer a number of things from the text of Genesis 3:21. First, to clothe Adam and Eve with skins, innocent blood had to be shed. One may correctly infer that an exchange was being made. How is it that Adam was able to remain in the presence of the sinless God? Only through sacrifice, with a view toward the cross, could Adam maintain a relationship with God. Sin's breach of separation can only be repaired through sacrifice. The import of atonement is exchange, adjustment of a difference, reconciliation, and restoration to favor. Therefore, God did shed blood on that day, innocent blood in the stead of Adam and Eve!

Second, one may infer that in a sense the Gospel was preached to Adam and Eve. The first couple was informed of the coming seed (Gen. 3:15) and obviously accepted God's terms of fellowship based on the *Seed's* death as their sin offering. That is the scope of Acts 17:30. "The times of this ignorance" refers to the days of existence between Adam and the cross. "Winked at" translates an aorist participle from the aorist verb *huereidon*, which primarily means "to look over or above a thing." Before the day that Adam and Eve sinned, God had already made His

choice. God the Word had decided to take Adam's place and be executed in his stead, and in the stead of his offspring. Therefore, God made a choice to look over the days of realized sin to the day that His Son Jesus Christ our Lord would bear the penalty for man's sin on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21). Through the cross God maintained His righteous integrity. Notice the inspired words of Romans 3:25-26:

Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Finally, it was He, God the Word in the flesh, who died for you and me! (Rom. 5:11). We are the posterity of Adam; hence, our opportunity for life evermore comes through the opportunity afforded to Adam because God is mindful of man! The opportunity for a second chance was not offered to angels who erred from the holy commandments delivered to them. The Bible says that, when the angels sinned, God spared them not, "but cast *them* down to hell [Tartarus], and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Man's fellowship with a sinless God is a privilege made possible by the Lord's grace through the shedding of His blood, and it is only accessed through man's obedience. This great and wonderful fellowship is based upon the fact that God is mindful of man.

WHAT DOES THE PHRASE *SON OF MAN* MEAN?

The Bible often uses *Son of man*. The Lord referred to Ezekiel as the son of man. In Daniel 7:13 *Son of Man* is a source of trouble for religious historians who deny the Deity of Christ. The Son of man in Daniel 7:13, they say, refers to "the saints of the Most High," specifically "Israel" (Vermes 169 and Sanders 246).⁴ However, Daniel's reference is to the ascension and coronation of the Lord, who often referred to Himself as the "Son of man" during His ministry. In part, Jesus used the phrase to mean "I," as is the case in Mark 2:28: "Therefore the Son of Man is [I am] Lord of the Sabbath." Notice also Matthew 8:20: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* [my] head."

John's record indicates that one of the reasons the Jews sought to kill Jesus was that Jesus said "God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Therefore, in first century Palestine, to be a son was to be equal with one's father. As the Son of God, Jesus is not

only to be understood as the only begotten Son of God, but Jesus is also to be understood as part of Godhood (John 1:1; Mic. 5:2; et al). This information is the key to understanding *son of man*. The phrase must mean "equal to man." The Lord referred to Ezekiel's manhood by use of "son of man." God simply called Ezekiel a mortal. When Jesus called Himself the "Son of man," He was referring to the fact that He was also a man. Because God is mindful of man, the Lord "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (Heb. 2:9). Jesus, who is all God and all man, is the only qualified mediator to stand between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5).

What does *son of man* as used in Psalm 8:4, mean? Keil and Delitzsch, like many biblical commentators, equate this phrase in Psalm 8:4 with Christ by appealing to Hebrews 2:6 (156). However, as mentioned earlier, this passage is focusing on man, not Christ. In the Hebrews passage, Christ is not brought into the picture until verse 9, where Jesus is portrayed as the one coming into man's world to save man. This was clearly understood by the translators of the King James Version, inasmuch as *son* in Hebrews 2:6 begins with the lower case *s*. The Psalms passage presents God as visiting man, not God visiting Himself. Hence, Psalm 8:4 contains a Hebrew parallelism: "What is man...and the son of man [mortal man]." Throughout the passage, frail, weak, mortal man is being considered!

GOD VISITS MORTAL MAN!

God visits man in ways that are positive and in ways that are negative. God visits the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate" Him (Exo. 20:5). Let it be understood that this statement does not mean that the sins of a father are passed down to his offspring. The Bible says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze. 18:4). Furthermore, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (Eze. 18:20). This is true because "every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jam. 1:14-15). The reason that God visits the sin of the fathers upon the children is that evil fathers teach their children to walk in their evil ways. Sin then becomes their lifestyle choice.

God also visits evil persons in a positive sense inasmuch as the sun rises "on the evil" and the rain falls on the "unjust" (Mat. 5:45). Sadly,

however, the majority of the unjust, like the Jews of long ago, refuse to look to the goodness of God and allow God to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). While basking in the wonderful blessings of God, like leaches sucking the blood of others so they can survive for another day, the majority of humanity lives in sin and sucks up the material blessings of a just God, treasuring for itself “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:5-6). How sad it is that men and women will choose hell over heaven because they want to enjoy the seasonal pleasures of sin (Heb. 11:25).

Have you noticed that apostasy seems to begin with a thankless attitude? So it was with the Gentiles, who had all that was necessary to know about God, yet they “glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:21). And so it will be with the majority of humanity! God visitest men, yet men blatantly and rebelliously ignore the wonderful God in heaven! Would to God that David’s tribe would increase and that men would look to the heavens and acknowledge the special place of man in light of the creation, and turn to the Lord of creation for salvation. Would to God that men would acknowledge the fact that the Lord is the one “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Heb.1:3)! Alas, “strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat. 7:14).

Man, for all of his folly and neglect, for all of his sins of omission and commission, and for all of his outrages on the holiness of the Master, will one day give an account. Death will not annihilate him, nor will the grave with all of its mysteries conceal him. The pyramids and the sphinx will surrender their long-lost Pharaohs, and all of the mummified bodies concealed in the caves and sand dunes of ancient Egypt will come forth and take their stand in judgment before Christ. Attila, the king of the Huns, who died of a drunken spasm in Hungary was encased in a casket of gold, a second of silver, and a third of iron. His body was hid under the cover of darkness in a colossal grave. The prisoners who buried Attila were then executed in a vain attempt to keep Attila’s resting place a secret. Mark it down friends, Attila will stand before Christ.

Alaric, the all-conquering Goth, after he conquered Rome, died, and multitudes of captives were set to work to turn a mighty river out of its course. When this work was finished, the great Alaric was placed in a

huge sepulcher adorned with the spoils and trophies of vanquished armies, and he was buried in the riverbed. After the river was returned to its course and all seemed to be hidden from view, the captives were murdered to keep Alaric's resting place a secret. Dead men can tell no tales, but the risen Savior, Christ the King who visited men, knows all things and will call Alaric before his throne to give an account of his life on earth.

Don Padro was once a mighty king of Portugal, but now his remains lay in the Church of Santa Maria in Lisbon. His mouth is closed and his tongue is still. Jewels and medals of Honor are still wreathed around his bosom, but now they are unattractive and dull. Don Padro's breastbone and backbone have fallen together. His arm now hangs useless from his shoulder blade and his jeweled sword, once carried into battle, now rests rusty and unemployed by his moldering hand. Near Don Padro are the remains of King Jose, whose marble statue is mounted upon a black war-charger, overlooking the Arch of Triumph in Black Horse Square. Today, King Jose is nothing more than a bag of dust. Death, with its arctic touch, has chilled every warm current in King Jose's royal body. Likewise, death will chill all men until the Lord comes; it matters not who that man is (Heb. 9:27)!

THE CREATION ITSELF IDENTIFIES MAN AS A SPECIAL BEING!

Most people today know something of the Milky Way. Ancient Greeks viewed it as the shining sea by which their mighty ancestors sailed to the hidden kingdom of Aides. Ancient Finlanders called the Milky Way the bright road that God put in the sky to guide birds across the world. The Babylonians and Persians regarded it as a mysterious river of light, rolling its surf across the sands of celestial islands. Native Americans looked at the Milky Way as the path of spirits to the happy hunting ground. The wonders of the heavens never cease to captivate the attention of man. Sailors once looked to the night sky to find true north. David looked to the night sky and exclaimed, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psa. 8:3-4). I suggest to you that David found true north!

Ask a mathematician to attempt to explain, in understandable terms, just how big the universe is—that is, what man's mortal mind has

learned of it thus far. It is amazing to know that in the midst of the vast expanse of the universe God created a special place for a special creation, man. Every detail necessary for man's physical survival on earth has been, and is, provided for by God. This David understood as he gazed into the heavens, which declare the handiwork of God, and acknowledged that man holds a special place in God's eyes!

EVOLUTION AND THEISTIC EVOLUTION ARE DEGRADING TO MANKIND

Attempts to explain God's wonderful creation in light of macro-evolution devalue men and in the end render men as mere animals among animals. Joe Ator, an Abilene Christian University graduate, wrote the article, "Science Teaching and Bible Teaching," for the Abilene Christian University production entitled, *Evolution and Faith*. Ator's thesis suggests that "scientific data" is the standard governing how the creation record in Genesis is to be interpreted. Ator, ridiculing the idea that anyone would believe in a young earth, took the denominational writer Henry Morris to task because of Morris' young earth beliefs. After examining several quotes from Morris' *The Genesis Record*, Ator wrote, "The purpose of relating the above excerpts from *The Genesis Record* commentary is to illustrate the foolishness of trying to explain away carefully measured scientific data about the universe in order to minimize its conflict with restrictive interpretations of the Genesis creation account. Most enlightened students will not accept such explanations, and it is unwise to pressure them into it" (110).

The compromise suggested by Ator and Abilene Christian University is an example of academic arrogance exalting itself against the knowledge of Scripture. Why is it so hard for some to understand that God created light before the heavenly bodies? On day one God said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). At that very moment this earth was illuminated with light that extended from earth to the place where, on day four, God would place the heavenly bodies (Gen. 1:14-19). All of the astronomical events, star cycles, et al., that are seen today by men, were calculated into that original burst of light by the God who gave His creation an appearance of age. Those who allege that God could not make such calculations will also find it difficult to believe in a manner acceptable to the Christ. Jesus addressed the academic arrogance of His day when He said, "For had ye believed

Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). Theistic Evolution degrades man to a mere creature of circumstance. Theistic Evolution was not the concept of David, who acknowledged the special creation of God and man's value in light of that creation.

Contrary to the opinion of some, men are never mighty in and of themselves. Great men are those men who are willing to hide behind God's plan and purpose, as the agents of God's purpose. The work of the Lord has no place for the arrogance and pride of men. Christianity is about the Lord and his redemption in the church. Great men and women of our day are those people who are crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). They are the men and women who work only as agents of God's purpose, to God's glory in the church (Eph. 3:21). Regardless of the cost, great men and women in Christianity are willing to be spent for the Lord's cause (2 Cor. 12:15). This is the kind of example that Old Testament passages, like Psalm 8:4, offer for our learning, patience, and comfort (Rom. 15:4). Science, so called, is in a constant state of flux, but the Bible stands on a rock solid bed of unchanging truth. Mankind can depend on the Bible all the way into the judgment!

What Ator and his kind need to do is to read the Bible and allow the Bible to open their eyes (Eph. 3:4). God's grace offers eye salve for the soul (Rev. 3:18). It was by the grace of God that Ananias was sent to restore Saul's sight (Acts 22:13). That same grace affords men an opportunity to see things as they are in reality by "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12). Continual self-examination is to the soul what preventive maintenance is to machinery. Through this process a child of God is able to acknowledge his own error and correct that error according to Scripture's plan. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In a special way, God is mindful of men who continually examine themselves in light of the truth. Naturalistic explanations for life offered by the arrogant are not based on biblical truth; hence, men who build on naturalistic explanations for life, build on a dangerous foundation (Mat. 7:26-27).

CONCLUSION

The greatest gift given to man was the death of Christ on the cross. Oh, that David could have seen that sacrifice in its reality! Today it is easy to see that "the dayspring from on high hath visited us" (Luke

1:78). He visited men because men hold a special place in God's creation. God loves mankind so much that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Who planted the moon in its garden of stars? Who sent the first ray of light across the darkness, as a bolt of lightning echoing through the universe? Who set the earth on her axis and set her in motion with the ease of a basketball player spinning a ball on his fingertips? At whose rebuke did the waters heed to remain within their boundaries? Who caused the morning's sweet dew to arise and glitter and shine as a precious and finely wrought stone? Whose hands molded and shaped all that we know, with the ease of a painter at his easel? Is man left to wonder who grew the thorns that pierced the Lord's brow? Who made the hands that so violently struck our Master? There is only one name that answers these questions—the One who cried out "it is finished."

The One who cried out "it is finished" is man's eternal Father in the sense that He is man's provider in eternity (Isa. 9:6). "Father" often carries the idea of a provider. Joseph was "a father to Pharaoh" (Gen. 45:8). Job was "a father to the poor" (Job 29:16). Because God is mindful of man, Jesus will provide the faithful in Christ with the blessing of eternity with God. Jesus affords the faithful protection (Rev. 21:4), a new and better body (2 Cor. 5:1), a new home (John 14:1-3), access to the tree of life (Rev. 2:7), and living waters of life (Rev. 7:17). Jesus will also provide white robes (Rev. 3:5), the crown of life (Rev. 2:10), and His gracious presence (Rev. 21:3). These provisions are offered to those who love and obey Him (John 14:15; Heb. 5:8-9).

How much greater is God's love toward those who have heard His Word and obeyed it? "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Rom. 5:9). Imagine God the Word as the one who was willing to leave the beauty of heaven, to come to this earth and die in man's stead! Like David, Christians ought to declare, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Like David, Christians need to begin each day with prayer: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up" (Psa. 5:3). What a privilege it is to have the ear of God.

For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil. And who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? (1 Pet. 3:12-13).

Following good is the natural result of obtaining the knowledge that God is mindful of man in a special way.

God is the God of hope (Psa. 146:5), life (Psa. 42:8), truth (Deu. 32:4), glory (Psa. 29:3), salvation (Psa. 68:20), and heaven (Psa. 136:26). Man's only hope, life, glory, salvation, and way into heaven will be found in Christ, because God is mindful of man. The young shepherd boy, David, with his little eight-book Bible (Job, Gen. - Ruth), was able to look into the heavens and acknowledge that the God of creation is mindful of man. How much more should you and I exclaim, "What is man that thou are mindful of him?"

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ENDNOTES

¹McClish's material on the foreknowledge of God proves that the Bible teaches that God's knowledge is not limited, nor has it ever been limited. Furthermore, McClish proves that God knew that Adam and Eve would sin before the creation took place.

²This work contains a vast amount of information about what God knew before He created man. It also has a detailed section dealing with the subject of the first sin and God's promise to Adam that he would die if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

³Wilson provides a number of Old Testament passages wherein *die* of Genesis 2:17 is used. It is clear that this Hebrew word means to be slain or executed.

⁴Vermes' work is an attempt to separate Jesus from His Deity and make our Lord out to be just another Galilean holy man like Honi the Circle Drawer, or Hanina ben Dosa. Sanders views the New Testament as an uninspired work of men. Accordingly, Sanders, who works to show Jesus from a liberal pericope perspective, reinterprets the picture of Jesus given in the New Testament. When Sanders is finished, Jesus is just another man among men.

“IF THE FOUNDATIONS BE DESTROYED, WHAT SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS DO?”

PSALM 11:3

Lee Davis



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INTRODUCTION

This year's theme is one that will provide (for many) several hours of rich and profitable study on many wonderful Bible subjects. The text under consideration will provide a starting place for this study. We will look at the context and meaning of this verse and make a few observations. Then, we will apply the principles found in this text to a text in the New Testament, and then make some modern day applications of that text.

Most Bible scholars say that David is the author of this psalm (Brown 70). They say that it was written during his time of escaping the wrath of Saul (Clarke 248). As far as a specific time frame, Adam Clarke states that David wrote this when the priests had been slaughtered by Doeg at the command of Saul (249). The assertion is that, because of the priests being killed, this had destroyed the religious foundations of Israel. Some commentators think that *foundations* has

reference to the state and how it had become corrupt and ineffective (Keil and Delitzsch 188). One cannot, substantively, find a difference in the two positions. For the case is that, since Saul did command the mass murder of the priests, he exhibited his woeful lack of leadership and ungodly life. Thus, when David writes this psalm, Israel is suffering from the ungodly and pathetic leadership of Saul. Therefore, the *foundations* of Israel had deteriorated to the point of becoming a regime that had ceased being what God intended it to be and had become the originator of persecution and tyranny. Thus, the rhetorical question is asked: “What shall the righteous do?” Keil and Delitzsch state that the question requires a negative answer—that is, there is nothing that can be done, for it had gotten so bad (188). It is also thought that David is stating that, since the life of the righteous man means nothing to Saul, then the righteous should *flee* (Clarke 248).

What David, through the Holy Spirit, is doing is voicing the concerns and thinking of those who do not have God as their refuge. In the remainder of the psalm, David answers the question of verse three. He goes on to state that the “LORD *is* in his holy temple.” In other words, God is in charge, and the righteous should take comfort in that fact. In verse five David points out that the way of the wicked and ungodly are hated by God. God will not let the wicked go unpunished. In verse seven David joyfully exclaims that the righteous Lord loves the righteous. The righteous should not fear; the God of the universe is on their side and will protect them.

The same principle applies today. It may seem that the ungodly of this world are *calling the shots*. The fact is God hates what the unrighteous are doing, and will completely destroy their works. All around us we see the world becoming more and more like its *god* (2 Cor. 4:4ff). Often the child of God becomes frustrated and disillusioned by the ungodly acts of those in governmental power and influence. Socially, the way of Christ is ridiculed and belittled. Men live lives that are ethically corrupt. Justice is a word that has lost its meaning in so many venues of our lives. It is a shame to see the murderer and the rapist set free with a *slap on the hand* while those who would have “under God” in our nation’s pledge are seen as being *unethical*. Yes, often is the case where we want to extend our hands to the sky and say, “Why even try?” However, we cannot stop being what God wants us to be even in the face of tyranny and injustice. It matters

not; ultimately, who is on the throne of the world, God is still in control. His will be done!

The same is true regarding things spiritual. Many are attempting to *destroy* the foundations of the Truth of God's Word. When thinking about the idea of *foundations*, the New Testament very succinctly gives the foundations of all things spiritual in a passage written by the great apostle Paul. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul sets out, what many times are called, the seven-point platform for unity and truth (Brownlow 63). In these few verses one can see explained the very fundamental truth of the Word of God, and, as will be illustrated, each point that is given by Paul deals with everything that the human being needs to know regarding things unseen and seen. Things not only spiritual but physical are addressed in these verses.

This study will address three major categories that are being assailed by those who would destroy what God's Word so very clearly states. The first category is the subject of the Godhead, the second is the nature of the Gospel, and the third is the nature of the church.

THE DESTROYING OF THE FOUNDATIONS RELATING TO THE GODHEAD (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Brother Franklin Camp used to say that most, if not all, error finds its origin in a misunderstanding and false view of the nature of the Godhead. One need only observe the brotherhood to see that even the truth regarding God's nature and work is being perverted and distorted. While it is true that one's understanding of the Trinity may not be exhaustive, one can know what the truth is on the subject and everything that one needs to know to be saved (Turner 57-66).

The Father

It is often the case that many view God as a Being who is no more than a "Santa Claus." When they need something, they bring the God of Heaven a *wish list* of all the goodies that they think they need. Of course, let it be said that God does want us to ask Him for the things of life of which He is the giver (Phi. 4:6; 1 The. 5:17). Inherent in the prayer life of a faithful child of God is the total dependence upon the Father for the things of life that will help us get to Heaven. However, the attitude that is condemned is the *user friendly* Deity—a view of God as One to whom we are to go to only in times when we *need* Him.

Prayers given by those who do not have a proper relationship with Him are not honored by Jehovah. Any other time these same needy ones would be living lives totally devoid of righteousness. Men and women, who had time and again refused to obey the wisdom of God, now have needs, and they are in trouble. The Scripture declares that the God of Heaven will laugh at their calamity (Pro. 1:24-33). A prayer being accepted by the Father is dependent on that person having a proper relationship with Him (John 9:31; 1 Pet. 3:12). The prayer of an erring child of God would fit this same category, except if the prayer is one of repentance (2 Chr. 7:14; Acts 8:18-24). This is true if it is sincere and not pretended. It is true that adversity can cause a person to be introspective and reflective of his life (Psa. 119:50-67), and that person making a decision to repent can be based on some of that somber thinking. Unfortunately, it is often the case, when the trouble passes, so does the *repentance*. What a person does with this opportunity of introspection is up to him. One may say, “This is not an attempt to destroy the proper belief in the Father.” Yes it is. When a person views God in this way, he has negated the proper view of the Father, and as far as this person is concerned, he has destroyed the proper teaching of the Father in his life. One utterly fails to see the proper nature of the Father when they look on Him as nothing more than a *goodies giver*. The God of Heaven is holy and lifted up (1 Pet. 1:15-17); He is not to be trifled with and tempted (Mat. 4:7). God is a consuming fire that demands our reverence (Heb. 10:31; 12:28-29).

On the other hand, an equally false view of God is the view that God is totally unapproachable. Some believe that the Father is a “cruel, vindictive, malevolent, Father of the Tribes.” They teach that God is a Being without mercy and benevolence. They teach a developing, evolving, Deity (Turner 25-38). The God of the Old Testament, according to these false teachers, is far more cruel and stringent than the God of the New Testament. They look at the Father as being “mean and unmoving” while Christ is viewed as being the “meek and mild” Lamb of God. This is a false and damnable teaching about the Godhead. Yet, this false doctrine is believed by the majority of the world. The fact is that what one observes in Jesus and His actions and attitudes are the identical actions and attitudes of God the Father. Jesus is the very image of the Father (John 1:18; Heb. 1:3). So, what the Father would do in every situation, one need only look at the Son’s actions to see that

illustrated. It is the case that what the Father thinks about any situation is exhibited and expressed by the Son. Views to the contrary stem from a refusal to accept the truth of passages that describe the multi-faceted attributes of the Godhead (Rom. 11:22). One cannot accept the all-loving and benevolent attribute of Deity and at the same time reject God's omni-justice and wrath.

The Son

Often one hears expressions like, "Christ never claimed to be Deity," and such like hyper-ignorant statements. To make statements like these is but to show one's grotesque ignorance of the Scripture. It illustrates the Modernistic drivel that exudes from the ultra-prejudiced minds of those who think they are educated (Turner 162-165). The pseudo-intellectualism that is so predominate in the world has served to create a type of arrogance in the body of Christ. One cannot use our own brethren to quote and research in their term papers in our colleges and universities. This is viewed as being narrowminded and *unscholarly*. It is certainly not popular to quote the Lord, Paul, Luke, or any other biblical writer. To be a *scholar* one must be saturated with the *garbage thinkers* of the liberal, modernistic, unbelieving religious world. The question is asked though, does the Lord ever refer to Himself as being Deity? One could produce Scripture after Scripture to illustrate without doubt that He did, in fact, refer to Himself as God (Mark 14:61-62; John 4:25-26—this verse is used even though some say that Christ's saying He is the Messiah does not mean He is saying He is Deity. This is a blatant attempt to destroy what the Scripture plainly teaches. We should define *Messiah* by using the Word of God not the uninspired, non-biblical writings of the time of Christ. When this is done, one can see that *Messiah* is equivalent to the idea of His being Deity—John 9:35-38; et al.). These verses teach conclusively that Jesus is God.

There is one section of Scripture in John that forever settles the issue of the Deity of Christ: John 8:33-59. Earlier, the Jews had attempted to kill the Lord because He taught that He was equal with the Father (John 5). A discussion about the "seed of Abraham" commences, and Jesus points out to them that if Abraham had been their father (spiritually), they would have obeyed His (Christ's) Word. Jesus points out that they were of their father the Devil and not of the spiritual seed of Abraham. They accused Jesus of being born of fornication (8:41). Jesus affirmed

that His Father was the God of Heaven. He pointed to the fact that He was without sin as being a proof of that fact (8:46). Jesus proclaimed that, if God were their Father, then they would hear His, Jesus' words. He affirms that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. The reaction of the people was typical of those who have no spiritual discernment. They said that Jesus was too young to have seen Abraham. Then the Lord makes a statement that affirms His Deity. He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (8:58). Jesus had affirmed earlier the same thing. He said, “For if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (8:24). Notice that “*he*” is in italics, meaning the translators supplied that word. Reading the verse without italics would be: “For if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins.” In both verses Jesus is affirming that He is the Great I Am. He is affirming that He is the One who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exo. 3). It was Jehovah who spoke to Moses. Jesus is claiming that title for Himself and that He is thus Deity. The reaction of the Jews to His statement confirms they understood Jesus to be confirming this (John 8:58).

For one to say that the Lord never affirmed Himself to be Deity is to stand against the clear teaching of the Word of God. The Word is very clear about Christ's Deity. He is called God on several occasions, one of which is made by the Hebrews writer. Paul quotes Psalm 45:6-7 and states that the verse applies to Christ. The verse states: “But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God” (Heb. 1:8). Our Lord is Deity! He is just as much God as the Father is. He is equal in His very nature with the Father. The inspired writer John recorded Jesus as saying, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17). John then makes an inspired, God-breathed comment on what Jesus affirmed: “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.” (5:18). To all correct-thinking people, these verses should settle the question.

A position that attacks the foundations of the belief and truth of the Lord's Deity is the denial by some of the pre-existence of Christ. Many of our members have drunk deeply in the wells of denominationalism, especially two major cults that have been very active in their visitation programs. “Jehovah's Witnesses” and Mormons are having some influence on the thinking of members of the Lord's church. In reality, it is not what comes from the outside of the body that weakens our

membership, if our membership is prepared to meet the challenge of these false teachers. The problem of not believing the truth of the Lord's pre-existence stems from a definitive lack of Bible knowledge among our brethren. Many are not willing to take the time to investigate the Scriptures to evaluate what they have been taught and believe and to determine if they have the truth or not. The people of God, at least some of them, are too busy having fun and making a living instead of balancing their lives with what really is important. The fact is, the subject of the pre-existence of Christ is one that takes effort to understand. Our people have accepted the false premise: "If it is difficult to understand, then do not bother, because it is not important anyway." They rationalize that ignorance is *bliss* and most are *blistered*. The truth is we are responsible for knowing what is revealed (Deu. 29:29).

While it is true that the subject of the pre-existence of Christ is "hard to understand," such does not mean it is a subject that is impossible to understand. If one is *stable* and *learned* then one can understand the subject (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Only those who are *unstable* (know the truth but do not accept it), and *unlearned* (those who are ignorant), "wrest the Scripture to their own destruction," and, as Peter adds, they do this not only to the difficult passages, but also to the "other Scripture" (those that are not hard to understand). Let us allow the Word to be our commentary on the subject (any subject for that matter) of the pre-existence of Christ. It is not so much the case that our brethren have accepted overt false teaching from these aforementioned cults; it is a simple fact of their not having educated themselves on the subject.

There are multitudes of Scripture that affirm the pre-existence of Christ, but only four of these references will be examined in this study.

Micah 5:2

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting." It is obvious that the place of the Lord's birth is prophesied in this verse, but there is also a strong statement of the pre-existence of the Lord found here as well. Notice, the One that would be born in Bethlehem was the One "whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from **everlasting**." One version translates *everlasting* as "the days of eternity." He is the One who would take on flesh in the time of Augustine, Emperor of Rome, but He did not have His beginning at that

time—His essence. He had his *beginning* in flesh, but not in His nature and essence. No, this One will have always been in existence. If this is not the meaning of the verse, let the Modernist bring a logical interpretation to the table. He cannot do it! The only thing the Modernist can do is deny the truth of the statement which is not intellectually honest. Neither can he say that this prophet wrote after the fact of Christ’s birth. **No one** has ever taken such a ludicrous position, successfully.

John 1:1-3

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word was the Creator of all that exists (John 1:2-3; Col. 1:11-18). Therefore, He was in existence prior to the Creation. One cannot be the Creator of all things and at the same time be a part of the Creation. The Word had existence prior to the Creation. This is necessitated by *was*, as found in the context. By simply accepting the wording of these verses without any additions or subtractions, one must draw the conclusion that the Word was in existence prior to the Creation. Also, the Word is of the very nature of God. One learns from John 1:14, 18 that the Word took on flesh and that the Word was known as Jesus Christ.

John 1:27

“He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose.” Another interesting section of Scripture concerning the pre-existence of Christ is also found in this context. This evidence comes from John the Baptist, the half-cousin of the Lord. John asserts that Jesus was *before me*. The One who was to come after him (John) had His (Jesus’) existence before him. John continues and makes an even more definitive statement: “This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for **he was before me**” (1:30). What is the significance of these verses? The fact was, John was, biologically, six months **older** than the Lord! (Luke 1-2). Did John get it right? Yes! John was not talking about the physical body of the Lord; he was discussing the second person in the Godhead: **the Word!**

John 17:5

“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” This is a statement from the Lord’s own mouth. John chapter 17 records the “Lord’s

Prayer.” Notice what the Lord states: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had **with thee before the world was.**” Yes, the Word was in existence prior to the creation of the world.

Yes, the Lord had a beginning in His physical body through the Virgin Birth, but this was not His beginning in His Essence. He is Deity and thus eternal in His very being (Turner 151-158). Our brethren need to know this so as to be able to combat the false teaching that exists on this Bible subject. When we are ignorant of this subject or allow the false teacher to go uncorrected, the very foundations are being destroyed concerning this wonderful Bible doctrine.

The Holy Spirit

In our class on the Holy Spirit at the Memphis School of Preaching, brother Keith Mosher pointed us to one Scripture that became a frame of reference for comparison of all teachings concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. That Scripture affirms: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). While the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms are under consideration at the time of this writing, still the principle is true of any law that the child of God is under. Today we are under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 8:1-2; Jam. 1:25). If one takes this simple and salient principle from Isaiah, there would be no false teaching on a Bible subject. There would be no question about the direct influence of the Spirit on the heart of anyone at anytime. The very existence of the Word of God itself proves that the Spirit has never and will never work directly on the hearts of **anyone**. Just because a verse does not explain the **how** of the work of the Spirit **does not** mean that we can assume the Spirit must work **directly**. The fact we are reading about the work of the Spirit **necessitates** an **indirect influence** of the Spirit through the medium of the Word and it only. The statement that the Spirit works **apart** from the Word and **in conjunction** with the Word is the double talk of a Calvinistic Pentecostal (Cates 46-47). Why will men persist in ignoring and rejecting the simple truth of Acts 20:32? Either the Word is *able*, or it is not able to “build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Was Paul correct in teaching that the Word of God “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)? Or are we to think that it takes the Spirit working directly on us to do so—and the Word “in

conjunction” with Him? If this is true, why have the Word? When one takes this position he is making the Word of God no more than a *redundancy system*. Thus, by their own definition they make the work of the Spirit less than all sufficient. They believe in an inept and faulty Deity. If this is not the case, then why not?

Those who take this position are like the Wesleys of Methodism infamy. They have to have a *warm* religion. They are not satisfied with *word only* propositions. Yet, they state that it is the *word only* that converts the heart of the alien sinner. How long will it take them to reject the idea that the Word is sufficient for the salvation of the alien? By implication, they have already rejected the idea. The fact remains, the Word is all-sufficient for the salvation of the alien and the sanctification of the saint.

Is this a *Word only* proposition? Not as they define it (Camp 13-23). They have in mind that the written Word is nothing more than *paper and ink*. No Bible believer accepts that statement. God has used words to communicate His will to mankind (1 Cor. 2:9-14). The words of the Bible, properly translated, are not simply *paper and ink* but the very vehicle that God uses to communicate His will to us. The words are powerful because God gave them. God uses **only** His Word to communicate His will. They believe it is the Word **and** the Spirit. How is that done? It is done by the Spirit, through/by, the Word. **Any** view of the work of the Spirit that lessens the position and importance of the Word of God is a **false doctrine**! The *Direct Influence* doctrine does exactly that. This teaching lessens the position and importance of the Word of God. They deny that the Word can do what it affirms it does (Cates 121-136). Teachings like these, attack the very foundations of the nature of the Holy Spirit.

THE DESTROYING OF THE FOUNDATIONS RELATING TO THE GOSPEL (Ephesians 4:5)

The Faith

The exclusive nature of the system of faith, the Gospel, is being referred to in this verse. Paul is not talking about the subjective (trusting) aspect of faith, but the objective system of the entire New Testament. It takes the system of faith to enable a person to trust in God by obeying His commandments. Paul states that there is one, and only one, system that provides salvation for man.

There is a battle raging today in the religious world and in the church. That battle centers around the inspiration of the Bible. Is the Bible inspired? How is it inspired? To what extent is it inspired? All of these questions are being asked by members of the worldly community and the Lord's church. It is alarming to see how members of the church are answering these questions. What does the Bible affirm? The Word is **verbally** inspired. That is, each word (in the original autographs as well as the text correctly translated) is given by the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:1-2; 1 Cor. 2:9-14).

The Word is also **plenary** in its inspiration. That is, we have all of the Word. There is no such thing as "Latter Day Revelation" (2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). The Word is completely and equally inspired and inerrant (Psa. 19:7-10; 119:160; Gal. 1:11-12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible is not a science book, but when it speaks regarding the subject, it is correct. The Bible is not a math, geography, etc., book, but when it speaks regarding these subjects, it is correct (Turner 1-18).

Today, we are hearing *our men* teach the Modernistic view of inspiration by saying that the "Priority of the book of Mark" and the existence of "Q" do not violate the *higher view* of inspiration (Turner 39-48). Ludicrous! These false teachings not only *violate* the *higher view of inspiration*, they fly in the face of cutting edge scholarship of today. The Liberal, Modernistic, religious crowd have turned from some of this *mess* and are teaching that Mark was not the first Gospel. They are rejecting the ridiculous teaching of "Q." They will say, "Matthew wrote Matthew. Mark wrote the book of Mark. Luke wrote the book of Luke." The only thing is, they do not believe they were inspired. At least, they reject the Form and Literary Criticism that was so characteristic of the Higher Destructive Critic.

Often one hears statements that detract from Paul's statement. When men try and define the one faith as being only that which relates to the Deity of Christ (Highers 97-99). While the faith does include this subject, it is not exclusive to it. The liberals will misuse and abuse 2 John 9-11 by defining the "doctrine of Christ" as being the teaching regarding His Deity. This false doctrine is a direct attack on the foundation of the one faith. The context of 2 John is proof enough that the "doctrine of Christ" is the totality of New Testament teaching—the Faith. Notice how many times the general and comprehensive terms, *truth* and *doctrine* are used in this short epistle. *Truth* is used five times.

Will one argue that the term only refers to the *truth* of the Deity of Christ? Yes, there is no doubt that it includes that, but **only** that? The liberal will not affirm this if he is honest with the context. The term refers to the entirety of the New Testament. *Commandment* or its relative is used four times. Again, does this only refer to the lone subject of the *commandment* of believing in the Deity of Christ? This is not likely, let alone, logical. *Doctrine* is used three times in the context; its basic meaning is “teaching.” One cannot deny, or want to do so, that the Deity of Christ is under consideration in verses 9-11. However to say that it **only** has reference to the Deity of Christ is an attempt to negate the idea that one is to follow the teaching of the New Testament in areas where there is controversy (the use of the mechanical instruments of music in worship, the Lord’s Supper each first day of the week, etc.).

The same is true of the definition some want to place on *faith* in Ephesians 4:5. All is done to accept and fellowship those who believe and practice things that are not authorized in the Scriptures. If these people are correct about these terms, *faith* and *doctrine*, then one need only have to believe in the teaching that Christ is the Divine Son of God and thus have faith in that one reality for there to be fellowship. *Doctrine* is as encompassing and all-inclusive as *truth* and *commandments*. *Faith* is defined by several contexts as being the complete teaching of the New Covenant that produces proper actions and attitudes (Gal. 3; Eph. 4:5, 13; Jude 3). This is what Jesus meant in John 6:52-71. To *eat* of the *flesh* of Christ and *drink* His blood, is to take in and accept, believe, and obey the entirety of the teachings of Christ: “the words of eternal life.” It is incorrect to define these statements as **only** relating to the Lord’s Supper. It would include the teaching of the Lord’s Supper only because that teaching is a part of the complete teaching of the Christ in His New Covenant.

When men depart from the Faith, they are eating away at the foundations that God has established.

Baptism

One would think that the subject of baptism is one that all members of the churches of Christ would have firmly in mind. Sadly, this is not the case. Over and over again, we are seeing men attempt to set aside God’s law of inclusion so as to *accommodate* those who have not been baptized (Miller 291-294). There is **one** baptism. There is **one way** of understanding it properly. Baptism is an immersion (Rom. 6:3-4; Col.

2:12). Those being baptized must understand that baptism is for the remission of sins, or its equivalent (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Those being baptized must understand that they are becoming a part of the kingdom of Christ, the church (Acts 8:12). It is impossible to be taught incorrectly about baptism in these areas, then believe that error, yet be baptized correctly. One does not accidentally obey the Gospel. A person does not accidentally become a member of the kingdom.

Some among us are saying that the teaching of the necessity of baptism is contradictory to the grace of God (Miller 307-313). Nonsense! They teach that baptism is a work of human merit and grace excludes works. In so teaching, they preach a Calvinistic cheap form of the grace of God. Baptism is not a work of human merit and never has been. No Gospel preacher has ever taught that it is, either. Paul taught that baptism (the new birth) is the means of obtaining the mercy (grace) of God in Titus 3:5. He states: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done [that is, not works of human device and construction] but according to his mercy he saved us." Paul is about to define mercy's requirements. *By*, that is through or by this means, "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (ASV). What is the "washing of regeneration"? Well, whatever it is, it is the washing that is characteristic of the regeneration. Jesus uses this word to describe the Christian Dispensation (Mat. 19:28).

Washing describes what is being accomplished by the act. The New Testament affirms that we are washed in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 1:5). John tells us **what** washes away our sin, but not **how** our sins are washed away. In Acts 22:16 we are told **how** those same sins are washed away. Ananias commands Saul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." Therefore, baptism is what washes away our sins in the Regeneration, the Christian age. Also, just as the Lord stated in John 3:3-5, there are two elements to the one new birth: water and the Spirit. *Renewing of the Holy Ghost* is identical to Jesus' statement to Nicodemus. One is born again by obeying the teachings of the Spirit, and those teachings state that our salvation culminates in the act of baptism. It is in baptism where we are translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13). It is in baptism where we come in contact with the blood of Christ and have our sins washed away (Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:3, 7; 2:13). Titus 3:5 also teaches us that baptism is a work

of faith and not a work of human merit. When men depart from this simple truth, they are destroying the foundations of the Word of God.

THE DESTROYING OF THE FOUNDATIONS RELATING TO THE CHURCH (Ephesians 4:4)

The One Body and One Hope

The singular nature of the church is ridiculed and blasphemed, even by some members of the church. The oneness of the Lord's church is as easily understood as the teaching of the one God. To set aside the teaching of the one church as being untrue is to negate the oneness of the Godhead. Many do not believe in the oneness of the faith, baptism, hope, and the church but affirm that there is but one God, one Jesus Christ, and one Holy Spirit. How can they possibly do this when the very context that affirms the latter also affirms the former? They can do so because they approach the text with pre-conceived, false views. They nullify the teaching of God because they believe and enforce their own false thinking by denying the obvious. The Bible affirms that there is one church just as much and just as effectively as it affirms the Deity of Christ. The Lord Himself teaches that there is “one fold, *and* one shepherd” (John 10:16). Did He mean it? Jesus states, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Mat. 16:18). Did He actually mean that there would be **one** (singular) church, and that it would be His? Absolutely! In the context of Ephesians 4:4, Paul defines *body* by saying it is the “church” (Eph. 1:22-23). When the New Testament affirms that there is **one** church, it does not mean **two** or even 33,000!

All of us have used the illustration of the lost child and the characteristics that must be followed to find that child. The identifying marks of the Lord's people are clearly given in the New Testament. This basic idea has always been presented to the world by those in the churches of Christ, but now, we have some *intellectuals* among us that ridicule this very approach. They deny the New Testament's having a pattern (Kamp 149-150). Yet they have constructed their own church in their own image. They believe in a pattern—their pattern. These are the same people that go about denying logic and rational thinking by attempting to use logic and rational thinking (of course they use their own illogic and irrationalism). If these men and women can get us to leave the proper way of interpreting the Scripture and have us accept their “new hermeneutic,” then they will have created a world of abysmal, agnosti-

cism. This would be an age where there would be no responsibility to know *truth*. They, as Pilate, would ask: “What is Truth?” They would live in a world of continual fluctuation. That is exactly what they want to create, and, sadly, many want to have it so. Why? The fact is, with agnosticism comes *freedom*. They think they have freedom from responsibility. When there is no responsibility, then there is no guilt, because there is no sin. There is no sin, because no one can know anything about anything, except that one cannot know anything. The perpetual contradiction is their world. Men like Shelly, Cope, Harris, and Lucado have created a world without absolutes with respect to what they choose not to believe. Theirs is a sad and fatalistic world—a world which has no hope in it. The “hope of their calling” has been negated because they have rejected the very foundations that support that hope. One cannot have the hope of Ephesians 4:4 without the solid, unmovable foundation of God’s Word.

CONCLUSION

When one destroys any of the foundations that are mentioned above, they become their own worst enemy. When a person perpetrates a little departure here and a little departure there regarding these seven ones of Ephesians 4:4-6, it will eventually lead to the destruction of the soul. The case is clearly made in the Scripture, that even though men may change, manipulate, deny, blaspheme, and refuse to obey the Word, they will not be able to destroy it. They can negate it in their lives, but they will not be able to destroy it anymore than they can destroy its Author (Mat. 24:35; John 10:35).

What can the righteous do? They can know their Bible. We can know and understand the Truth (John 8:32; Eph. 5:17), and we can defend the Truth with every fiber of our being (Phi. 1:17; Jude 3). If we allow those who teach and practice error to go uncorrected, we are allowing the *little foxes* to eat away at the *foundations*. We can live the Truth in our lives (1 Tim. 4:16), teach the Truth to our children (Eph. 6:4), and teach it to faithful men who will teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). The Lord would have never commanded these things of us if it were impossible for us to comply with His will. Brethren, let us take up the Sword of the Spirit and advance to the enemy of Truth and *spare not*.

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“WHO SHALL ABIDE IN THY TABERNACLE?”

PSALM 15:1

John West



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INTRODUCTION

Psalms 15 paints a beautiful picture of one who is faithful to God. It shows the character and integrity of such a person. “It has been called the ‘Gentleman’s Psalm’ since the hallmarks of a true gentleman or ideal person are delightfully delineated therein” (Taylor 27). This Psalm has a great application for the Christian in today’s world. A person following the principles outlined in this Psalm will grow closer to God and to heaven.

Verse 1 indicates that David is the human penman of this Psalm, but the Holy Spirit is the true author of it as Peter notes in 2 Peter 1:21: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.” This chapter will discuss the questions asked in verse 1, give the answers (both positive and negative), and finally notice a comforting conclusion for those who follow it.

THE QUESTIONS ASKED

In verse 1, David asks two questions. He does not ask the question of man, but of God. This Psalm begins with the phrase: “LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?” Man is not capable of answering such a question; this could only be answered from heaven. Robert Taylor

states, "Man is not equipped to give description of the person God approves for His earthly fellowship now and His heavenly fellowship in the sweet by and by. Only the Lord can do this" (28). The second question is: "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" These two questions carry a great deal a weight with the follower of God. *Abide* in the first question means to "sojourn" and is "temporary in scope" (Taylor 28). The tabernacle was used during the wandering in the wilderness and was meant to be temporary in nature. *Dwell* is just the opposite of "sojourn" in that it has reference to a permanent place where one would reside.

Under Solomon...the permanent temple was built on Mt. Moriah... The questions therefore raised by the sincere psalmist had to do with what manner of life was required for one to abide (sojourn) in the Lord's tabernacle and to dwell permanently with the Lord in His holy hill (the temple on Mt. Moriah). As applicable to us under the gospel dispensation the question would touch how are we to sojourn or abide with the Lord in the church on earth and then ultimately to dwell with Him permanently in the heaven on high at last. The tabernacle was a type of the church and the temple a type of heaven as this psalm is made applicable and profitable for us. These two aspects are what Adam Clarke calls the church militant (here on earth) and the church triumphant (in heaven at last) (Taylor 28).

THE ANSWERS GIVEN

The righteousness of a person is seen in verses 2-5. This psalm shows the integrity of the individual who will dwell with God eternally. "Rather than attempting to be comprehensive, these qualifications use one's social relationships and especially one's speech as the 'litmus test' to indicate one's true 'color'" (Broyles 92). The rest of this psalm indicates the qualities of the man of God.

Walks Uprightly

Walk is a reference to one's journey through this life. The type of walk required for the man of God is that he walks *uprightly*. God required Abraham to "walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). Christians today are told to walk uprightly by "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12). This man is considered a man of honesty, faithfulness, and moral character.

He is really what he professes to be, is sound at heart, and can approve himself to God, in his integrity, in all he does; his conversation is

uniform, and he is of a piece [sic] with himself, and endeavours to stand complete in all the will of God (Henry 286).

For the Christian to one day be in heaven, he must do as this psalm teaches. Jesus states that the way to heaven is by “do[ing] the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21).

Works Righteousness

The next characteristic of the man of God is that his life is one of righteousness. He lives right both morally and spiritually. Peter states: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). One who is working righteousness is doing “all in the name of the Lord” (Col. 3:17). It is the righteousness of God being worked, not man’s righteousness (Tit. 3:5). Jesus states in the sermon on the Mount that one is to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33). The man of God “walks by the rules of righteousness and truth, and scorns and abhors the gains of injustice and fraud” (Henry 286).

Speaks the Truth in His Heart

The man of God recognizes the importance of truth. He is the opposite of the one who speaks “vanity every one with his neighbour: *with* flattering lips *and* with a double heart do they speak” (Psa. 12:2). He does not use flattering or enticing words but carries the truth as a banner in his life. Solomon writes, “Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips *shall be* right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips” (Pro. 8:6-7). Not only does he speak truth, but he lives it. Unlike the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, the truth is in his heart, not just on his lips. Jesus states, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me” (Mat. 15:8). They were giving lip service to God, but not following Him with the heart. The true follower of God will not only honor him with his lips, but the truth will be in his heart.

Backbites Not with His Tongue

Backbite is defined as, “to speak slanderously or spitefully about a person. Backbiting involves an element of deceit and cowardice. It should be avoided by Christians” (Nelson 128). The man of God does not destroy the character of another, especially behind his back.

The backbiter is of extremely low breeding; no real character adorns him. He is cowardly in that he fears to say to a person's face what he says to that person's back. He is brutal because he maliciously murders or massacres the character of those he disdains (Taylor 30).

Paul lists backbiters among the list of those who do things that are worthy of death (Rom. 1:29-32). A person who backbites slanders his neighbor. The Psalmist condemns such behavior when he writes, “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer” (Psa. 101:5). God will cut off all those involved in slandering another person. The Christian will not do such, but he will speak kind words about his fellow-man. One must be careful about his words, for one day they will come back to him in judgment.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Mat. 12:36-37).

A backbiter will be condemned eternally for the slanderous, malicious things said about his fellow man.

Does No Evil to His Neighbor

This list is impressive—especially pertaining to this society where bribery, backbiting, oppression of the poor, and slander were widely prevalent. In David's day, the man of God would have carried a great influence that would shine like the sun. He did nothing intentionally to his neighbor that will cause hurt or pain in his life. The application for the Christian today would be the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” One who practices the *Golden Rule* will only seek good for his neighbor and avoid anything that would hurt him.

Does Not Take up Reproach Against His Neighbor

“He refuses to take up (receive) a reproach against a neighbor and peddle it abroad.” (Taylor 30). It is the case that many times, when one hears *juicy* gossip about others, he is quick to spread it to cause further harm to the individual involved. The man of God refuses to get involved in such slanderous, idle chat. If a person never received the gossip, it would not be spread. It is only when the gossip is given an audience that rumors are spread. Christians today need to heed this

valuable lesson and learn that it is a sin to receive and spread things that will hurt another's character. The motto of the Christian should be, "Above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14).

In His Eyes a Vile Person Is Despised

The King James Version uses *condemned* in verse 4, while the American Standard Version uses *despised*. This verse is referring to someone who is a wicked person. "Wicked people are vile people, worthless and good for nothing (so the word signifies), as dross, as chaff, and as salt that has lost its savour" (Henry 286). Isaiah describes this kind of person:

For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail (Isa. 32:6).

A vile person will hurt anyone who gets in his way. He has no concern for the feelings of others. The true man of God despises this kind of lifestyle and attitude. Christians are told to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). The vile person must not only be despised for sin, but reprovved because of sin. When one fellowships this person, he is partaking in his evil deeds (2 John 9-11). Brethren today need to heed this verse and practice it. Many are not despising sin and error but are rather fellowshiping and condoning it. The Lord will take His vengeance on these hypocrites on the day of judgment.

He Honors Those Who Fear the Lord

The man of God does not fellowship one in sin, but he honors the one who fears the Lord and does His will. This phrase indicates that the one who fears the Lord is the one keeping His commandments. "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do *his commandments*: his praise endureth for ever" (Psa. 111:10). John writes that we show our love toward God by keeping His commandments (John 14:15; 1 John 3:4). When one is living right, others should esteem him highly and respect him for his faithfulness to God. This is the reason that Paul writes that we are in honor to prefer one another (Rom. 12:10).

He honours such, esteems them very highly in love, desires their friendship and conversation and an interest in their prayers, is glad of

an opportunity to show them respect or do them a good office, pleads their cause and speaks of them with veneration, rejoices when they prosper, grieves when they are removed, and their memory, when they are gone, is precious with him. By this we may judge of ourselves in some measure (Henry 286).

He Swears to His Own Hurt and Changes Not

"His word is as good as a binding written document duly signed and properly notarized. He keeps his word even if a loss occurs" (Taylor 30). The man of God would rather face hurt and loss rather than break his word. A man's word should be his bond. Jesus says, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Mat. 5:37). One must be careful not to make idle promises that he does not intend to keep. One must follow the example of God who always keeps His Word. Peter records, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). If the Lord makes a promise, He will keep it and He expects Christians today to do the same.

He Does Not Put His Money to Usury

Usury could also be translated "interest." It refers to charging excessive, illegal, or unlawful interest on money borrowed. A modern day person fitting this description would be the "loan shark," who charges outrageous fees at the expense of others. "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury" (Deu. 23:19). Laws allowed for the Jew to lend to a stranger with interest.

Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it (Deu. 23:20).

The man of God is fair in his dealings with his fellow man.

OT law forbade lending with interest to Israelites because the only reason in view for loans was to help one "who is needy" (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:19-20). Thus, lending in the OT should be understood as a means of extending help to the needy, not as a means of investing for the lender. These laws curbed the interest rates current elsewhere in the ancient Near East (Broyles 95).

He Does Not Take Reward Against the Innocent

This is a reference to a bribe taken against another, especially a fellow Israelite. It “may be to judges and witnesses, because both could easily pervert the course of justice” (Anderson 139). “This is a picture of glaring depravity. It but emphasizes how degraded men of that era were. God-approved men never, never stoop this low” (Taylor 31). In applying this today, how could one who is called a Christian, take a bribe against a brother or sister in Christ for personal gain? This goes against all principles of Christianity for which Christ died.

CONCLUSION

By following these principles discussed, the man of God will not be moved (Psa. 15:5). Peter made a similar statement in 2 Peter 1:10-11: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” The one keeping God’s commandments will never fall, but have an abundant entrance into the kingdom. “The bottom line of this entire chapter deals with both character (what God knows us to be) and reputation (what others think us to be)” (Taylor 32). When man lives according to the principles outlined in this beautiful Psalm, one day, he will live with God eternally in heaven.

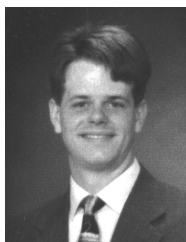
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“WHAT SHALL I RENDER UNTO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS TOWARD ME?”

PSALM 116:12

Bryan R. Braswell



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INTRODUCTION

The psalmist proclaimed: “What shall I render unto the LORD *for* all his benefits toward me?” Psalm 116 is embedded deeply in the antiquity of the Holy Spirit inspired writings of Psalms and thus a portion of our canonized Scripture. This psalm is purely one of the 150 that were compiled and conserved for our learning in the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4). The 116th Psalm is ascribed to the fifth division or book, and one of six with a humble presentation as a *hallel*, or psalm of thanksgiving. There is no doubt as to its authenticity in all of holy Writ. Its reception into the Hebrew Scriptures as a part of the *Tehillim*, meaning “praise” in the Hebrew, is genuine and original. Ultimately, quotations found in the New Testament from this book leave no question as to its inspiration (cf., Mat. 11:29; 2 Cor. 4:13; Rom. 3:4).

The psalmist expresses his love for the Lord because the Lord has: (1) heard his voice in prayer; (2) inclined His ear unto him; (3) helped him; (4) dealt bountifully unto him; and (5) delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling. The eloquent, inspired writer proclaims, “I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was

greatly afflicted” (116:10). In parallel fashion, the apostle Paul declares:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak (2 Cor. 4:8-13).

Christians today are of this same motivation. When the child of God ascertains the personal application within this passage, he quickly realizes that his life as a Christian is diametrically opposed to the world’s standards. Therefore, he understands the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). The psalmist has undergone a tremendous amount of persecution, evidently, unto bloodshed and possibly the loss of life. This is a type of persecution which most of us today have not experienced (Heb. 12:4). Because of his deliverance and triumph over this affliction, he, as with anybody who is faithful to the Lord in principle, *gives* glory to God. This is the underlying ideal of worshiping the Father in spirit—meaning, the disposition of mind displayed in worship or praise to the Father (John 4:23-24). For all that God has done the psalmist cries: “What shall I render unto the Lord *for* all His benefits toward me” (116:12)? This is a awe-inspiring observation for one to consider upon recognition of God’s grace (116:5)! The psalmist is expressing the idea of what can I do in return for all God has done and continues to do, and which I could not do by myself. This is the ideal of Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.” When one truly recognizes how hopeless he is without God’s goodness and mercy, he will turn his attention toward diligent service to the Lord, expressing this faith in obedience for all of His benefits. This is the key to blessedness. This is the proper response in recognition of God’s blessings: “What shall we do” (cf., John 6:28; Acts 2:37).

However, in the grand balance of all things, one thing is for sure and that is, as the Lord stated, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have

done that which was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10). Isaiah said, “We are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6). This question in Psalm 116:12 epitomizes the totality and balance of man’s purpose in life (Ecc. 12:13; Rom. 6:17-18). Not that I have merited one thing from the Lord, but my only response can be, “What shall *I* do for all the Lord has done for me?”

“What *shall* I render unto the Lord for *all* of His benefits toward *me*?” Within the depths of his own thoughts contained in the psalm, the writer answers his own question as found in verses 13-19. First, he will take the cup of salvation (13a); he will call upon the name of Jehovah (13b, 17b); he will pay his vows unto Yahweh, in the presence of all His people (14, 18); he will offer to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving (17); and in verse 19 a final statement is given, “In the courts of the LORD’S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.” There is absolutely no doubt to the principle answer to the question posed by the psalmist. It was one of praise and worship for all the Lord had done for him. We can do no better! Today, in these last and final days, we are under the guidance of the New Testament or perfect Law of Liberty (Heb. 9:1ff; Jam. 1:25). Therefore, we must offer praise and worship to God acceptably under this New Covenant (cf., John 4:23-24). The praise and worship rendered for everything God has done for us is according to spirit and truth. “God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” This is the comprehensive principle to consider.

After the psalmist experiences the salvation, deliverance, guidance, and victory of redemption thru the Lord—overcoming all, he earnestly expresses a dedication to praise and worship. Our expression in the Christian age **must** be the same. Once we have expressed our faith in obedience, and demonstrated our trust in “the faith of the operation/working of God” redeeming us from our sins, the question presented before salvation should persist; what shall we continue to do (cf., John 6:28; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor. 15:58)?

In a systematic study of our topic in Psalm 116:12 we shall determine the thought provoking answer by breaking down the question into three sections. First, all benefits are **for me**, or God’s crown of creation—man. God created man in the garden perfect and pure, and thus, all that God has done in this world is focused toward man (Gen.

1:26-31). We are not at the top of the primordial food chain because there is no God. If so, then answers to the question as to what we must continue to do, and any others pertaining to the purpose of life is futile. We are the crown of God's own creation! Thus, all benefits are for us. God's love and grace will dominate this portion of the study.

Second, not only are we the recipients of **all** these benefits, but we must acknowledge the essentiality of **all** of God's benefits. "All" indicates completeness or perfectness. Every Christian should explore the totality of God's benefits, and the means by which they consist. Focusing on the specifics of God's goodness, we will better understand the answer to this question. How do we understand the benefits and their purposes without "giving diligence" to them (cf., Heb. 11:6)? Better understanding all of God's benefits will help us better understand our purpose and role in life. Furthermore, these benefits can only be from God, not man. God is sovereign, the Creator, and He has made all things good (Gen. 1:31; Jam. 1:17). Therefore, all things good and perfect, not twisted and perverted, are from God and are beneficial and **vital** for you and me!

Finally, upon recognizing the **benefits** of God **toward** His crown of creation, we will then study the proper response. "What shall I render?" Our *rendering* comprises the "whole of man" mentioned in Ecclesiastes 12:13. It is calculated by our faith expressed in action, which is determined by good or bad fruits (Mat. 7:15-23). We must learn to fear—reverence God and keep His commandments. We must recognize that this is the **whole** of man! **When** we recognize **Who** gives **all** good things, and that we are the recipients of those good things, as with the psalmist, we will readily pose the same noble question in our lives: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all of His benefits toward me?"

ALL OF GOD'S BENEFITS ARE *FOR* ME

The psalmist identified with specific benefits that were toward him. The Lord had heard his voice and supplication, indicating ardent prayers offered by his faith (Psa. 116:9-10). He believed and therefore spoke. The psalmist acknowledged his prayers were heard and answered after his deliverance, preservation, and peace of mind were granted. Again, because of his faith, he spoke. This indicates his obedience of faith. This all occurred after God's response. Therefore, the psalmist **in** his **good** faith accepts his beneficial blessings through his relief from trials and tribulations. His relief causes him to give glory

and honor to God. These specific providential benefits toward him also belong to us when we correspond and react to God's will in good faith. In the same manner as the psalmist and the apostle Paul wrote, we should be able to boldly say, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." When we concentrate all that we say and do upon the confirmed will of God expressed through Christ, we too can rightly say: "I believed, therefore have I spoken." *Believed* indicates our faith and *spoken* indicates our obedience. God's benefits are the foundation and reason for our faith to be expressed in obedience. All of His benefits are promised to each and every child of God (Mat. 6:33-34).

In regard to God's general providence, it is true that it rains and shines upon the godly as well as the ungodly. There are certain and specific benefits which belong to the child of God only (cf., Mat. 5:45). This is why Paul states, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). One must be *in* Christ before he or she can be a partaker of **all** of God's blessings. These blessings are spiritual in nature; they are "in heavenly places." They are not material in their makeup; they simply relate to the riches of God's grace, knowing we have redemption by the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7). It is in this way that God has blessed us and abounded toward us in all His wisdom and prudence, **through** the Gospel of Jesus Christ (cf., Eph. 1:8-13; 3:1-5; 4:1-3).

Some say faith is the principal thing. The Proverbs writer said, "Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Pro. 4:7). When we rightly divide the concrete, objective standard of God's Word, we will live purposeful lives. This implies a life of confidence or boldness because of God's eternal benefits. Patterning our lives in this manner will only lead to a proper understanding of life's true **purpose** and bountiful **blessings**. Only God can give true purposes and abundant blessings that are **all** a part of His benefits. When one so lives his life, he better understands and accepts the words of Peter:

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: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye

might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

Peter closes this epistle by stating that we must “grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). We can only do this when we grow in the knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 1:2, 5-10). This grace, or favor wherein we grow, is achieved by **abounding** back toward God through His gospel (cf., 1 Pet. 1:22). As God has abounded toward us in **all** things that pertain unto life and godliness, we must abound back through these things expressed in the “Christian graces” as revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-8. This is the way we will exercise godliness and make our calling and election sure (1 Tim. 4:7-16; 2 The. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:10)! In this we will better understand and appreciate God’s grace and mercy toward you and me.

Growing in God’s benefits (grace) through His knowledge, which is revealed only in His Word or Gospel will help us to better understand how “**all** things that *pertain* unto life and godliness” are revealed! To help us understand, Peter records these words:

Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:9-13).

Thereby, we will understand how **all** of God’s benefits are **directed** toward you and me—God’s crown of creation, with living eternal spirits, which only God can give. Where is the monkey that can affirm God’s love? Where is the bear, lion, tiger, bull, or goat that can take away the sins of the world? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By this, all of God’s benefits are exuded. Everlasting life equates to the entirety of God’s benefits; to *whosoever* will react to them with faith expressed in obedience (cf., John 3:36)! All of God’s benefits are toward His crown

of creation—mankind! There is no excuse for insecurities, but, rather, assurances through God’s benefits. These benefits are expressed through God’s gospel. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16-17). God’s love, mercy, grace, justice, truth, His way, peace, et al., are all recorded and revealed in His Word. Thus, all of God’s benefits are toward you and me. Likewise, when we understand this concept and the source of it, we should speak by faith with boldness according to these benefits. There is no other choice.

ALL OF GOD’S BENEFITS INDICATE COMPLETENESS AND ESSENTIALITY

All that God has done makes up our purpose in life. In fact, as alluded to previously, the atheist cannot define man’s purpose while denying God’s existence. He becomes foolish and corrupt, committing abominable works unable to do good (Psa. 14:1). All of God’s benefits symbolize His perfectness, holiness, and goodness, and our inability to be such without Him. Within God’s benefits, we find our authority for all that we say or will ever do (Col. 3:16-17).

During the days of the psalmist, not all of God’s benefits had been revealed relative to redemption in Christ. We can learn a great lesson about the Old Testament from this fact. Without God’s continual, divine and direct guidance in revealing His will, the Old Testament patrons would have had no purpose. It was, then, in the unfolding of God’s will that they had to find their purpose in life—by faith. Peter points out in 1 Peter 1:8-13 that they searched diligently, waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises. These promises found in the Old Covenant all pointed to Christ’s cause and constituted their purpose in life. Therefore their responsibility was the same as ours today, responding according to faith in God’s will even though it was not fully revealed then (Psa. 116:10). “The just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4; cf., Rom. 1:17).

The psalmist *believed*. What did he believe? He believed in the grace of God because of the benefits implied and inferred in God’s favor (Psa. 116:5, 12). God’s favor has always surrounded His purposes and promises. Therefore, throughout the Old as even now in the New, God’s promises are the basis for man’s purpose in this life. It is the

whole of man's existence. When man does not recognize God's benefits, God will allow him to become reprobate (Rom. 1:18-32). This lack of recognition is the mustard seed that has blossomed into our current conflicts today. No doubt, the psalmist identified with the benefit of being able to overcome as a result of God's grace which was lifesaving and most beneficial toward him. Thus, he learned that **all** of God's benefits are essential.

Man could not be whole without God's benefits. Jesus came to fulfill all in all (Eph.1:18-23). "For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). According to the preceding verse: "Of [Christ's] fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (v. 16). Jesus is the Word that was in the beginning with God and was God (John 1:1). Hence, Inspiration continues: "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (vv. 2-4). Jesus said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (6:35). In similar metaphorical fashion, He states to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (4:14). Our faith is established by Christ's words, according to Romans 10:17 (ASV). Jesus later commented in John's account: "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6). Thus, He is the essential element of God's benefits. In Jesus are **all** spiritual blessings, and **all** are essential (Eph. 1:3). Outside of Him there is nothing eternal or lasting.

When one does as Paul commands and exhorts: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another" (Col. 3:16), then one will truly understand how eternal life without Christ's Word is impossible. All of Christ's words are essential for freedom and knowledge of how to continually overcome sin. Without Christ's words we would be as Paul states in principle: "Of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Paul writes:

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).

All indicates the completeness of God’s Word. **All** of God’s Word is able to make us perfect, or complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. There is nothing we can do above and beyond what His Word teaches or implies. There is nothing more we can apply to make us whole or complete. Therefore, for us to be complete in Christ, we must be abounding and abiding in the God-breathed, inspired Words from His mind and mouth (cf., Col. 2:9-12), by which we learn that all of God’s benefits are essential for life everlasting! Do we abide by all of God’s Word—or some of God’s Word? Herein is where all of God’s benefits are revealed and received. Without all of His benefits, we cannot be complete. Thus, they are **all** essential.

“WHAT SHALL I RENDER UNTO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS TOWARD ME?”

Solomon said long ago:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

The whole of man is summed up in two ideas: Faith expressed in the right attitude of reverence or fear, and obedience to God’s commandments. Man’s eternal destiny hangs in the balance of these two things. If man’s attitude is not right, miscalculated, or illogical, it is likely he will never find the proper balance in life. Attitude is everything, and obedience is key. Fruits are the outcome of these two entities tied together. Jesus said, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat. 7:20). He also said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Righteous judgment is based upon righteous fruits that are produced in glorifying God in all that we say and do (cf., John 15:8). Unrighteous judgment is based upon material appearance without complete spiritual discernment of a person. Incidentally, this is the reason that James reasons thusly in his epistle:

Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:21-27).

Furthermore:

What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?... faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone... wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (Jam. 2:14, 17, 20).

Faith, or the right attitude displayed, will never be acceptable if it does not fear God. If one does not obey God because of insecurities or a lack of faith, thereby foregoing the actual application of God's Word or commands, he will never be justified or perfected (Jam. 2:22, 24). Many people today proclaim a belief in God, but they do not express such in complete submission to His will (or commands). This is faith alone, which is imperfect and not a justified faith!

Paul stated, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). In essence, a part of Paul's inspired writings, as Scripture, are commands (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Paul proclaimed, in part, the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 3:1-5; Col. 1:25). This Gospel has commands, which convey the necessity of responding and obeying. If a person's attitude is not right, he will not obey God's commands—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the grand scheme of the question posed by the psalmist: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" we find the New Testament equivalent: "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). What we must do is express the right attitude to the right benefit. God's grace will save us, but not until we obey that grace (Rom. 6:16-18). When we start rendering a faithful life under the New Covenant commands, then, in principle, we will be living the same life the psalmist lived. This life will be one of worshiping the Father in spirit and in truth, one day at a time, earnestly contending for the faith, fighting a good fight, because "faith which worketh by love" is what will save one's soul (cf., Jude 3; 2 Tim. 4:7; Rev. 2:10; Gal. 5:6).

This is the whole purpose for man’s existence. When we do the will of God, by obeying and revering Him, then and only then will we be blessed (cf., Mat. 7:15-23). In so doing, we give glory and honor to God Almighty for all that He has done for us. Within this thought-provoking question we find the fulfillment of all man could ever aspire to do in this life. Rendering back to the Lord for all of His benefits, will fulfill the two greatest commandments ever given:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mat. 22:37-40).

As the Master said, we must do. Those who will not render unto the Lord will fall into the category of disobedient sinners. Those who will render unto the Lord, will find themselves walking steadfastly in the light of God’s grace, wherein we stand (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 John 1:5-10; Rom. 5:2; 6:1-5). Thus we shall be the blessed of God, and He will be recognized as the Most Blessed!

CONCLUSION

Recognizing the benefits of godliness and the essentiality of those benefits is the only thing which will give us hope and purpose in this life. The person that does not recognize these things is without any true hope and purpose in this life. Praise be to God for His marvelous wisdom—unfolded through the heirloom of written inspiration in the powerful Psalms of antiquity (Rom. 11:33-36; 15:4)!

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WHO HATH WOE...REDNESS OF THE EYES?”

PROVERBS 23:29-30

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PREFACE

The study of the Old Testament is a noble venture which will deepen one's understanding of the Scheme of Redemption and how to live under the Perfect Law of Liberty (Jam. 1:25). The apostle Paul wrote, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

INTRODUCTION

The answers to the questions at hand contain the key for releasing millions from lives of heartache and pain. "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?" (Pro. 23:29). The answer is, "They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine" (23:30). However, the effects of such sinful conduct are not limited to the individuals who engage therein. The recreational consumption of alcohol is a scourge to all mankind.

Consider the lasting effects of alcohol from the eternal perspective (Col. 3:1; 1 Cor. 5:7). In 1999, 394,900 potential years of life were lost from alcohol related traffic crashes (Williams and Dufour). How many of this number might have eventually heard the Lord's invitation in a

sermon and obeyed the Gospel? But they never got the chance! Why? Each case started with just one drink!

The truths found in God's Word, if followed, could have easily changed this grim statistic, and the gravity of this problem must be impressed upon us.

THE QUESTIONS

These questions posed by the writer of Proverbs are designed to preview and highlight the horrors of drinking. Each of them shows the devastating and distasteful effects of alcohol and together they paint a poor picture of the putrid punch.

Who Hath Woe?

One of the saddest facts is that often the wicked drunkard walks away from murder with few or no injuries. How then may it be said that he has woe and sorrow? Aside from the direct and physical consequences listed in the text, the woe faced by corrupt drinkers is of the gravest sort. While robbing the world of billions of occasions for salvation, they are damning their own souls.

The Scriptures teach: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Furthermore, no one will escape the judgment: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). The imbibor will have to stand before Jesus Christ who did not sin (Heb. 4:15) and gave His life that others may live (Rom. 5:8-9; John 3:16). They will stand before the great judge (1 Tim. 4:1) with alcohol on their breath and blood on their hands and attempt to explain why they chose to use their time on earth robbing opportunities for salvation and in rebellion to His Word. **Woe** unto that man! However, all may be avoided if souls will only turn to God and rely upon His Holy Word (Pro. 3:5). *Woe* is an exclamation, and the Proverbs' writer wants the reader to provide a clear picture of the state of this individual. He is one who cries out "woe," is in a woeful state, and has others pronouncing woe upon him.

Woe is used throughout Scriptures to magnify the repercussions of sin.¹ In Isaiah 6:5 the prophet finds himself before God and realizes his pitiful state. His cry of desperation is because he is *undone* or cut off from God. Being cut off from God is not something to be taken lightly; it is the most dreadful state in which man can find himself. Isaiah

himself would address the Israelites concerning their state in Isaiah 59:1-2, saying:

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.

Upon grasping the gravity of his situation, Isaiah stated the reason for his outcry: "Because I *am* a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). This natural progression of thought is honorable and essential for salvation. The tender heart can do little more than cry in despair when it realizes the magnitude of being cut off from God, and then comes the acknowledgment of personal worthlessness and failure before God.

Woe is a "state of intense hardship and distress...stressing the intensity and personal engagement in the state of sorrow" (Swanson GK208). It is an "impassioned expression of grief and despair... often implying a denunciation" (Brown, Driver, Briggs 17.1).

Who Hath Sorrow?

Sorrow is the embodiment of regret. As the Proverbs writer uses this word along with *woe*, there is a subtle word play. Both of these are exclamations resembling incoherent sounds. It is an "exclamation of pain, **Oh!**" (Brown, Driver, Briggs 5.1). Watching the groans of one who spent a night indulging in liquor ought to be enough to deter anyone. Adam Clarke elaborated on this idea:

I believe Solomon refers here to the natural effects of drunkenness. And perhaps...oi, which we translate wo, and...aboi, which we translate sorrow, are mere natural sounds or vociferations that take place among drunken men, either from illness, or the nauseating effects of too much liquor. As to contentions among such, babblings on a variety of subjects, which they neither understand nor are fit to discuss (3:768).

Albert Barnes likewise noted, "**Woe... sorrow**—The words in the original are interjections, probably expressing distress. The sharp touch of the satirist reproduces the actual inarticulate utterances of drunkenness" (65).

Who Hath Contentions?

Contentions and drinking go hand in hand like rain and wet. Terms like "bar-room brawl" are not arbitrary. Advocates of drinking and those in defense of drinking establishments are hard pressed to overcome such stigmas. Imagine someone upholding an evening at the

tavern as good wholesome entertainment. Why then are not "ice-cream parlor altercations" or "burger-barn bashes" part of common parlance?

Hostility is one of the chief features of an alcoholic.

Alcoholics often show evidence of marked hostility toward those closest to them...occasionally, repressed hostility does break out during an acute intoxication stage—one of Zwerling's patients was stopped just as he was trying to push his father out of a hotel room window (Roche 22).

One drug rehabilitation center reports that "four in ten criminal offenders report alcohol as a factor in violence" (Narconon). "Among spouse violence victims, three out of four incidents were reported to have involved alcohol use by the offender" (Narconon). Crime in general goes along with the drinking culture. The economic cost of alcohol related crime in the U.S. in 1992 alone was \$6,312,000,000 (Harwood, Fountain, and Livermore).

Who Has Babbling?

A babbler is not a likely candidate for decent reasonable conversation. The translation of *babbler* seems to recognize that the drinker is one incapable of relevant speech and communication. However the word is often translated "complaint." What could be more characteristic of the drunk than an outpouring of self-pity wherein every third word is intelligible? Especially looking to the end of their situation the drunkard is indeed a complainer. The rest of the passage shows there is plenty to complain about. The physical aches, the social shame, and emotional guilt of the first drink all scream for more drinks to help them cope. However, all these things they have brought upon themselves and have none to blame but themselves.

Who Has Wounds Without Cause?

It is a sure formula for disaster to place oneself in an environment where there are plenty of sorry, agitated, violent people who are not seeing or thinking very well. For this reason there are many "wounds without cause" in the sense that one may be beaten for something he did not necessarily do. Keil and Delitzsch note that these are "strokes which one receives without being in the situation from necessity, or duty to expect them, strokes for nothing and in return for nothing" (347).

Whereas fights are probably in view here, inasmuch as they are noted later in the context, another aspect wherein drinkers incur

physical damage is the harming of themselves with liquor itself. God revealed this to man years before modern society began to chronicle the medical horrors of drinking.

Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Pro. 23:33-35).

This self-inflicted pain, and perpetual seeking would be more fitly called social suicide. It is amazing that there remains uproar over doctor-assisted suicide while convenient store assisted suicide remains acceptable. Not only does society accept this, many religious teachers are adamant in their stand that drinking is not condemned by the scriptures.

There is a consensus among many in the medical industry that drinking is willful self-murder. Consider the following quotes:

It sometimes seems that the alcohol addict is deliberately bent on destroying himself, on alienating his family and friends and ruining both his career and his reputation. And, in the view of Karl Menninger, chronic alcoholism should actually be termed chronic suicide, that form of self destruction in which individuals commit suicide by inches (Roche 28).

Dylan Thomas is one case of this slow self-murder.

J. M. Brinnin, who accompanied Thomas on his lecture tours of the United States, reports that the famous Welsh poet drank steadily despite occasional attacks of coughing followed by severe retching and vomiting. "I think I have cirrhosis of the liver," the poet informed Brinnin after one of these attacks, but he refused to cut down on his drinking. Significantly, one of the last things he said before going into a fatal alcoholic coma was, "I want to go to the Garden of Eden—to die...to be forever unconscious" (Roche 28).

These are hopes the poet will never realize.

Also the drunk receives wounds without cause from being unable to perform the simplest tasks due to their impairment. Countless vaudeville entertainers rose to fame performing caricatures of "the drunk." The familiar images of their stumbling and tumbling automatically tip the audience to the fact that their character had been drinking. Sadly, the comical spills these comedians had perfected were much safer than the dangers genuine drunks face under the influence. Even worse than the inability to perform routine simple tasks are the complex shenani-

gans in which the drunkard so willingly engages. Consider the following anecdote.

(June 2002, Georgia) An EMT in southern Georgia was part of the unit that responded to a call from Coffee County late one night. They arrived on the scene and found a severely injured man lying at the edge of a field. His stomach had been completely torn open, and he was covered with lacerations and bruises. He also had a prominent tire tread across his chest.

The injured man's companion showed up in a racing model ATV vehicle, clearly intoxicated, and gave the following account. Imagine this tale being recited in a deep Georgian accent.

He and his injured friend had been drinkin' and ridin' around the field on the three-wheeled ATV, when they sighted a stand of deer in their headlights. The friend, riding the back as a passenger, was struck with a great idea. "Hey man," he said, "If you quarter off one a those deer, betcha I can bulldog 'im." The driver thought this was an entertaining idea, so he proceeded to isolate a buck and race him down.

His intoxicated passenger proceeded to leap from the ATV, grab the buck by the antlers, and perform an excellent example of this rodeo sport. He pinned the animal's head to the ground, but that's when things went wrong. The buck, less docile than a steer, simply got up, threw his head back, and tore his assailant's belly open. The deer then proceeded to stomp, kick, and butt him for good measure.

The EMTs noticed that this information accounted all of the injuries except one. When they asked the driver about the tire track across his injured friend's chest, he responded: "Well how else was I s'posed to git the deer off 'im?"

I don't know which is worse: a drunk moron trying to wrestle a grown male deer like a steer, or a drunk moron who runs over his injured friend to scare away the righteously angered animal (Baesman).

Who Has Redness of Eyes?

One would believe that in a culture so captivated by glamour, the disfigurement of drunkenness would be enough to deter drinking, but this is not the case. Instead the powers of the vile potion work against these problems. The popular phenomenon known all over as "beer-goggling" is just the kind of thing which overcomes the fixation on appearance. Red eyes are sure to follow drinking and become more so with the greater quantity. Any chemical which enlarges the blood vessels will have this effect. This is the reason for the warm sensations drinker feel, and their flushed appearances.

While red eyes are definitely a result of drinking, it is competently argued that the Proverb suggests impaired vision instead. Keil and Delitzsch say that this redness is really a

darkening (clouding) of the eyes, from לָחַךְ, to be dim, closed, and transferred to the sensation of light: to be dark (*vid.*, at Gen. 49:12; Psa. 10:8); the copper-nose of the drunkard is not under consideration; the word does not refer to the reddening, but the dimming of the eyes, and of the power of vision" (347).

The Pulpit Commentary entertains this view: "But Delitzsh, Nowack, and many modern commentators consider that the word indicates 'dimness of sight,' that the change in the power of vision when the stimulant reaches the brain" (Deane and Taylor-Taswell 445).

A brief word study is helpful in corroborating this thought. The word translated "redness" is *chakliluwth*. Strong defines this term "blearedness" (#2448) while Swanson defines it as: "dimness, dullness, i.e., bloodshot eyes or bleary sight due to excess drinking" (GK2680). Finally Brown Driver Briggs notes that the word is "**dulness**, of eyes in drunkenness" (314.1).

This is fundamentally important in defense of the inspiration of Scriptures and establishing the sinfulness of the recreational use of alcohol. A study at Glasgow University was set up to establish whether or not there was any merit in the claim to "Beer-goggling." "Professor Barry Jones, from Glasgow University's psychology department and his fellow academic, Ben Jones, from St. Andrews University, led the study" (BBC News). "They found that men and women who have drunk a moderate amount of alcohol find the faces of the opposite sex 25% more attractive than their sober counterparts" (BBC News). These findings are not surprising. First, the Scriptures testify to these effects of alcohol: "Thine eyes shall behold strange women" (Pro. 23:33) and the specific verse under consideration shows the impaired eyesight.

Several studies have concluded that vision is affected by alcohol.

Alcohol adversely affects performance on many tasks. At moderate blood alcohol levels and possibly lower levels, a slowed **perceptual speed** is a component of the task performance (Biomedical).

Alcohol's chief pharmacological action is on the central nervous system, where it acts as a depressant, slowing and hampering both motor performance, such as the control of speech and eye movements (Roche 28).

Compromised vision is not limited to higher levels of alcohol consumption:

Consuming alcohol can have short-term negative affects [*sic*] on vision. For a low blood alcohol level, visual performance is less affected by the visual changes than by alteration in brain functions. Brain functions can be impaired by alcohol within minutes of consumption since alcohol is absorbed in the blood and the brain is supplied with more blood than other organs (Biomedical).

These lower levels of alcohol have adverse results on the parts of the brain which are responsible for the process of seeing. "Tests by delicate instruments have indicated that small doses of ethyl alcohol also affect the functions of sight, hearing, and touch sensation, in each instance by the depressant or narcotic action upon the central nervous system" (Jeffcoat 91). Guy N. Woods noted:

Results attending the drinking of intoxicating liquors are thus strikingly set out by the ancient writer as "errors in vision," and "stumbling in judgment."...Recent studies in highway fatalities reveal that in some states, half of the people dying in automobile accidents do so because of the impaired faculties of drinking drivers. It has been proved that a driver under the influence of alcohol, has greatly reduced range of sight, an inability to judge distances, is unable to make quick decisions, and often suffers from blurred vision (22).

From its first introduction to the body, alcohol impairs one's vision in a way which is measurable and detrimental to important tasks.

In a written discussion on alcohol, the question came up about objective standards of drunkenness and the concept of "one drop drunk." An individual contending that a Christian could drink in moderation attempted to show the futility of the "one drop drunk concept" through a series of questions.

Geoff answered true to my first question, the one drop drunk question. He stated in his answer: "True, A person who consumes one molecule of alcohol is intoxicated to the degree that one molecule intoxicates." If this were true, then every time I used mouth wash like Scope or something with alcohol in it, I immediately have red eyes, slurred words, and all that other stuff above because I've got a molecule or two of alcohol in me (absorbed into the blood stream through the tongue).²

The futility of his position is clearly exhibited because the Scriptures make a clear distinction between medicinal use and recreational use (1 Tim. 5:23; Eph. 5:18). However, his conclusion about red eyes is correct: alcohol given in any amount, for any purpose impairs vision to that degree, and the Bible associates this with the evils of drunkenness.

Thus, the Scriptures uphold the concept. How does one avoid such conclusions when faced with such facts? In a later exchange he said:

I had the opportunity just a couple of weeks ago to eat dinner where two of the people each had two glasses of wine. Afterwards they were able to teach my brother and I how to play bridge, a very detailed and complex game. They did not have red eyes and they were very nice folk and never wanted to pick a fight with us, even when my brother and the wife of the couple trounced the husband and I. Practical application alone is enough to show the silliness of Geoff's position. But I'm more interested in scriptural proof as I'm sure everyone reading this is.

The Scriptural proof is found in Proverbs 23, whereas this pro-drinker finds comfort in a subjective personal experience.³

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

All these questions are intended to paint a picture of the consequences of recreational use of alcohol. The book of Proverbs is a book of general wisdom and it provides a practical warning against any non-medicinal use of alcohol. In any age this material ought to be heeded. It is not uncommon for imbibers to seek comfort in some sort of chronological or cultural barrier they have constructed in their minds. In a work originally published in the 1800s, Dr. Benjamin Rush listed the symptoms characteristic of the drunkard:

Certain extravagant acts which indicate a temporary fit of madness. These are singing, hallooing, roaring, imitating the noises of brute animals, jumping, tearing off clothes, dancing naked, breaking glasses and china, and dashing other articles of household furniture upon the ground or floor.

After a while the paroxysm of drunkenness is completely formed. The face now becomes flushed, the eyes project, and are somewhat watery, winking is less frequent than is natural; the under lip is protruded—the head inclines a little to one shoulder;—the jaw falls;—belchings and hiccup [*sic*] take place—the limbs totter;—the whole body staggers. The unfortunate subject of this history next falls on his seat,—he looks around him with a vacant countenance, and mutters inarticulate sounds to himself;—he attempts to rise and walk. In this attempt, he falls on his side, from which he gradually turns upon his back.

He now closes his eyes, and falls into a profound sleep, frequently attended by snoring, and profuse sweats, and sometimes with such a relaxation of the muscles which confine the bladder and the lower bowels, as to produce a symptom which delicacy forbids me to mention. In this condition, he often lies from ten, twelve, and twenty-

four hours, to two, three, and four and five days, an object of pity and disgust to his family and friends (Roche 42).

This sounds as if Dr. Rush only paraphrased the Proverb which was penned thousands of years prior. Today, the description would be the same, but who would suffer such a fate? They who tarry long at the wine, and they who seek mixed drinks.

WISDOM AND WINE

Job through Song of Solomon are known as books of wisdom. Proverbs is especially a book of wisdom. The Bible extols the virtue of wisdom from cover to cover. James 1:5 teaches that there is a wisdom which comes from above (Jam. 3:13-18). Within the scope of all reality there are only two sources of authority—that which is from above and that which is from man (Mat. 21:23-25). The wisdom from above is what man must seek to please God, the wisdom of the Proverbs reveals: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12). Jeremiah understood this point, declaring, “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Wine is something which seems right from man’s perspective, but is not authorized from above.

In Ephesians 5:1-2, Christians are told to follow Christ and **walk** in love (1 John 5:3; 2:5; John 14:15), thus letting Christ who is above **direct their steps** (Col. 3:1; 1 John 1:7). The next section of the chapter admonishes Christians to turn from the former wickedness which characterized the lives to which they died in Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). Drunkenness is one example of the wickedness of the former life. Paul went on to say:

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Eph. 5:8-12).

Christians are in the light and must **walk** in the light (1 John 1:7) in contrast to those in darkness. Elsewhere Paul showed some of the things of darkness and furthered the contrast, saying:

Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting

on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him (1 The. 5:6-10).

Drunkenness is of the night—of darkness—a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:21)—and not the fruit of the spirit. Christians are of the light and must be sober.

Here is where Ephesians 5 brings the subjects of wisdom, study, understanding, and abstinence into perspective. The apostle wrote:

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (vv. 15-18).

In light of what Paul had previously written in Ephesians (especially in the beginning of chapter 5), the readers are told not to be fools. Whoever is not foolish is wise and vice-versa. How then may a person be wise? Understand the will of the Lord! It is not surprising that so many who advocate authority for social drinking are the same ones who also advocate that the Scriptures, the Last Will and Testament of the Lord (Heb. 9:15-17), cannot be understood (i.e., New Hermeneutics). Earlier in the epistle the apostle stated that, when the Scriptures are read the will of the Lord may be understood (Eph. 3:3-4). This line of thought falls in perfect harmony with a parallel passage:

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. 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. 3:16-17).

The path to wisdom is paved by the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In this way one is filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The opposite of being filled with the Spirit is the opposite of wisdom—foolishness. An opposite of wisdom is being **filled with wine**! Being filled with wine is foolishness. An individual's spirituality and wisdom is directly connected to his abstinence from alcohol.

With those thoughts consider the words of the wise man: “Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Pro. 20:1). The very point is that drinking is unwise, and anyone who believes he can drink and be wise is deceived and a fool.

Ask any officer who has worked an alcohol-related accident; the drunken offender rarely replies: "I knew I was too ripped to drive!" Instead, you are more likely to see someone having a beer or two then saying, "No, really, I'm OK to drive," as they head out the door to the convenient store to pick up peanuts or more beer. Solomon said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Therefore, these statements of confidence are often the "famous last words of a fool." The deception is clear and observable:

Recently, the chief of the surgical staff of one of the nation's great hospitals said: "I have had ample opportunity to see hundreds and hundreds of people injured, crippled or killed as a result of accidents caused by drinking drivers. It is not the drunken driver but the drinking driver—the one with a glass or two of beer under his belt—who so often takes chances that result in disaster" (Woods 23).

Drinking and driving is not the only way or reason that drinking is wrong. Nevertheless, it is the focus of attention for the place where statistical research is done, and where the dangers and deceitfulness of the wicked brew are most clearly seen.

WILLFULLY WOEFUL

The proverb clearly shows that *will* figures into the problem. Generally, people believe they can drink because they want to drink. Justification for liquor does not come from an honest investigation of the Scriptures. Who reads the Bible from the tragedy of Noah's behavior to the negative figurative portrayal of the intoxicating cup in Revelation (17:2; 18:3) and comes to the conclusion that drinking is a positive thing? Philippians 4:8 teaches:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.

It is impossible to find virtue and praise and good reports coming from the non-medicinal consumption of alcohol. Those who sow to the wind are those who "**tarry long** at the wine; they that go to **seek** mixed wine" (Pro. 23:30). People drink alcohol for a number of different reasons, all of which are condemned by the Scriptures.

Some drink to "fit in with the crowd." The Scriptures show the wickedness of this attitude alone no matter how it is manifested. Moses said, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do* evil" (Exo. 23:2). Trying to receive the acclamation of men is consistently repudiated: "Woe unto

you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). Trying to fit in is a surefire way unto destruction especially among drinkers: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Chiefly, people drink for the effects of the alcohol. The *seeking* for mixed drinks and desire to *tarry long* brings the purpose into focus. People drink to feel different, otherwise there is no reason for drinking alcohol to take place. Simple grape juice and/or corn have power unto pleasure (Psa. 104:14-15; Zec. 9:7) and do not break down the seat of inhibition. There is **no authority** for seeking chemicals to impair faculties, inhibitions, and judgment. Isaiah addressed this approach to wine saying, “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, *that* they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, *till* wine inflame them!” (Isa. 5:11). Therein, with a swift stroke of the pen, he settled for all that there is wickedness in drinking **from the first drink to the last!**

ABSTINENCE ADVOCATED

Teaching of hardships without advice on avoiding them borders on cruelty, but the Proverbs writer provides practical counsel. Noting the only imperative statement in the passage, a reader can easily find the main idea contained therein. The drinker is full of woe; therefore people should totally avoid drinking. “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright” (Pro. 23:31).

How could a person get sauced while not looking at the drink? Does this mean they should drink with their eyes closed? Those who tarry long will have sorrow. How does one avoid that? Do not even look at the alcoholic wine. Why? It has no virtue, only the source of great sorrow: strange women, sickness, hangovers, and worse. This is generally in accord with the language of the Proverbs and the figures used by the inspired writer. Harmony is the problem of those who advocate moderate drinking. Can you imagine someone reading the Bible and coming to Proverbs reading all that is said about wine and the like and still believing that it is a virtuous thing and a good work to drink such (2 Tim. 3:16-17)?

Throughout the Scriptures total avoidance and abstinence from the alcoholic beverage is expected. The priests were explicitly commanded to be free of wine while in service at the Tabernacle (Lev. 10:8-10).

Christians are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). Nazarites were not only to abstain from alcohol, but all products of the vine (Num. 6:1-12). In the New Testament drunkenness is explicitly prohibited (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18).

The New Testament does not (explicitly) provide an amount of alcohol which constitutes drunkenness. Yet, it does make the connection to wine in Ephesians 5:18: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." When thought out, this leads to the conclusion that any amount constitutes drunkenness and is thus sinful, or God has given a subjective standard whereby he may send souls to hell arbitrarily. If one granted the concept that drinking without becoming drunk is possible,⁴ nevertheless a person still cannot know the amount which will make him drunk. "J. S. Sinacore indicates that the same amount of alcohol will have differing effects on a person as compared to another and may even differ in the same individual from week to week" (Jeffcoat 95). Furthermore there is an overwhelming amount of variables which affect an individual's tolerance level: "These variables make it impossible to formulate a rule that will safeguard even one person!" (Jeffcoat 95).

Moreover, the "don't even look at it" principle of the Proverb is found more explicitly in the New Testament in the idea of *sobriety*. Usually, when the concept of sobriety enters into a discussion of alcohol, drinking advocates are hasty to point out that *sobriety* points to reasonableness or clarity of mind and does not have reference to substances. What usually follows is quite revealing, the woeful soul points out all the things in their lives which they allow to keep them from being sober (i.e., sleep deprivation, caffeine, medicine, etc.). Without explaining the spiritual quality of each item, note that, when they introduce these ideas without effectively refuting the principle of sobriety, they do not show that imbibing alcohol is authorized. Instead, they show that, if they truly believe these items are parallel, and persist therein, then they do not care what the Scriptures teach about sobriety.

Sober is in many cases referring to sound mindedness without **direct** reference to substances (1 Pet. 4:7). However, it cannot be successfully maintained that alcohol does not impair judgment, thus rendering one incapable of being sound minded. Additionally, some commands to sobriety do demand total abstinence with the clearest terms. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6 Paul wrote, "Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober." Here *sober* does not have

primary reference to sound mindedness, but freedom from intoxication. The Greek word *nepho* in this passage refers to abstinence from wine.

A brief look at *nepho* provides positive evidence that Paul was speaking of total abstinence from wine. Vine gives the primary meaning: "To be free from the influence of intoxicants" (583). A look at Liddell and Scott make it abundantly clear that one cannot drink alcoholic wine and fulfill this obligation to be sober or, "to drink no wine" (532). The word is connected to its early form *nephalios* which they define as, "unmixed with wine, wineless" (532). The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives for the first definition of *nepho*,

The concept which underlies the verb νέφω = "to be sober" and the whole word group, is formally negative. It is the opposite of "intoxication" (→ μεθύω) both 1. in the lit. sense of intoxication with wine, and 2. in the fig. sense of states of spiritual intoxication attributable to other causes (Bauernfeind 936).

However, they claim that the word is only used in a figurative sense in the New Testament. 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 embraces both the idea of alertness in contrast to sleep, and the freedom from intoxicants in contrast to drunkenness. The drunkenness is what takes place in the night. This is a generalization based on common practice. In every age drunkenness is something usually⁵ restricted to the nights. Moulton and Milligan submit that *nephalios* "referred to the altars at which only wineless offerings were made or perhaps to cakes made in the form of an altar, free from all infusion of wine" (426-427). The same word for *sober* occurs in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Adam Clarke comments:

It is not *every one* that he can *swallow down*: those who are *sober* and *vigilant* are proof against him, these he May Not *swallow down*; those who are *drunken* with the cares of this world, etc., and are *unwatchful*, these he May *swallow down*. There is a beauty in this verse, and a striking apposition between the *first* and *last words*, which I think have not been noticed: *Be sober*, νηψατε from νη, *not*, and πειν to *drink*; *do not drink*, *do not swallow down*: and the word καταπιν, from κατα, *down*, and πειν, to *drink*. If you swallow strong drink down, the devil will swallow you down. Hear this, ye drunkards, toppers, tipplers, or by whatsoever name you are known in society, or among your fellow sinners. Strong drink is not only the way to the devil, but the devil's way into you; and YE are such as the devil particularly May *swallow down* (6:869).

The most crucial and overlooked point about the use of alcohol is the simple fact that the recreational consumption of alcohol is **unauthorized** by the New Testament. Some brethren will approach this issue demanding the verse that says they cannot imbibe while condemning those who use pianos in worship; the same verse condemns both—Colossians 3:17. Whatsoever is not authorized by the New Testament by direct statement, example, or implication is sinful. Who can confidently affirm the proposition: "I drink alcohol in the name of the Lord"?

WHICH WINE?

The proverb clearly says: "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright" (23:31). In an effort to overcome the obvious, allegations are made about the substance itself. Some begin to try to cast doubt on medicinal use as if that authorizes their drunkenness. Others contend that, if this kind of abstinence were followed, then no juice could be drunk (which they believe constitutes an absurdity). As noted above, this kind of thinking betrays their intentions rather than supports their case.

A basic look at the passage shows the type of wine under consideration. First, the context is **not** discussing medicinal use which is authorized (1 Tim. 5:3). The treatment of illness and disease are found nowhere in the proverb. The effects listed are not those of profitable use as in Paul's advice to Timothy⁶ (1 Tim. 5:3). Second, this is not a broad restriction from juice in general but alcoholic beverages. Juice alone does not produce any of the impairments warned about in the text.

Mothers across the world favor juice as a wholesome refreshment for their children. Few mothers encourage their children to play with poisonous snakes. The Proverbs writer says, "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (23:32). This declares that the wine in view is toxic. Something most fail to realize is that alcohol is a poisonous substance. "In fact, the term commonly applied to the abnormal conditions produced by, alcohol, 'intoxication,' is derived from the Latin term *toxicum*, meaning 'poison'" (Jeffcoat 103). When toxic substances are introduced into the body, one is intoxicated.

What could be more appropriate in making this point to the nation of Israel at the time in which Proverbs was written? The fact that a bite from a serpent injected poison was well known. The wine itself is compared to this substance produced by poisonous snakes. In Deuteron-

omy 32:33 there is a comparison of wine to the poison of the deadly reptiles.⁷ A person must poison themselves to become intoxicated. Since the comparison is made to the venom of reptiles, can a person successfully endorse drinking and not also endorse the recreational use of snake venom, or licking toad skins which produces hallucinogenic effects? (Erowid).

Another popular misconception is that all wine in the Bible was alcoholic to some degree, the implication being, since those faithful in the Scriptures drank wine, and all wine was alcoholic, today one may also drink alcohol.⁸ This however, is based on the false assumption which again arises out of a desire to drink—and not an honest evaluation of God’s Holy Word. The Scriptures refer to the grapevine itself as wine (Num. 6:4; Jud. 9:13). Joel wrote of wine dried up in the field (Joel 1:10). Raisins and adders have little in common in power and appearance (adders puff and raisins shrivel). Wine is sometimes in reference to grapes still on the vine (Isa. 65:8). Finally, when the grapes are freshly trodden, the non-alcoholic product is labeled *wine* by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 16:10; Joel 2:24; cf., Gen. 40:11).

It may be easily observed that *wine*, as used in the Scriptures, is a general term. It can refer to many things ranging from the vine, the fruit thereon, the diverse drinks which come from the grape, and even various other byproducts. Even without an in-depth word study of the terms rendered *wine* and the various processes by which the ancients preserved the grape juice, the doctrine of “alcoholic only wine” falls short upon scriptural scrutiny.

THE QUESTION AND ANSWER

A collection of the greatest questions in the Old Testament is a contemplation of matters of the greatest magnitude known to man. From the beginning, man has been plagued with the same concerns: life, death, sin, and salvation. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). While sin stands between man and God, man can only cry out *woe* (Isa. 6:5; 59:1-2). All things which bring woe must be avoided with the greatest determination. Alcohol has stood between man and God for thousands of years. Its influence has shaped history (Gen. 9:24-27), changed the face of the east throughout generations (Gen. 19:30-38), caused heartache, pain, turmoil, and death—all this woe, and for what? “Who

hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?" (Pro. 23:29-30).

Surely some seek, but the pleasures of sin are but for a season (Heb. 11:25).

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death (Pro. 14:12).

At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder (Pro. 23:32).

Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise (Pro. 20:1).

Wisdom comes from God and not the world (Jam. 1:5).

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16).

Sin is in the world, and "the wages of sin *is* death" (Rom. 6:23). Wine with all its enticements and allurements only offers woe, pain, sorrow, and death.

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, *and I felt it* not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again (Pro. 23:29-35).

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ENDNOTES

¹It is not exclusively in recognition of sin, it can be used to speak of physical despair. The despair of a sinful state is the most common usage. Both are in view here, and we must not look at one to the exclusion of the other.

²This is a correspondence between Geoff Litke and a member of the church who believes that drinking is authorized. It was agreed that the name would be withheld until the correspondence had ended. This should be available to anyone interested by the time this volume is published.

³The position is that he could not tell by looking that they were drunk. This is based upon a subjective and ambiguous definition of drunk. Jesus said "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24; cf., Psa. 119:172; Acts 17:31; Rom. 1:16-17).

⁴This concept can be successfully denied and is not granted in the least bit.

⁵None affirm the impossibility of being drunk in the day, nor deny that it does indeed happen, but the fact stands that generally it is a nighttime practice, here Paul contrasts those in the light and those in darkness (cf., John 3:19-21).

⁶A hatchet has a profitable use for chopping wood, but is not fitted for removing a fly from your friend's forehead.

⁷This passage uses wine figuratively as representing them drinking of wickedness (of which alcohol is a component) and ultimately God's wrath. This, by itself, does not prove that the wine was alcoholic, but it does assume the common association in the mind of the reader.

⁸This is where the John 2 argument becomes important. The claim is made that Jesus created alcohol, thereby authorizing its use, but if He did, then He sinned by so doing (Hab. 2:15; Heb. 4:15). See additional resources for articles by David Brown and Jerry Moffitt which cover this topic quite well.

“WHO CAN FIND A VIRTUOUS WOMAN?”

PROVERBS 31:10

Jerry L. Martin



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INTRODUCTION

What a great theme is selected this year: *Great Old Testament Questions*. Proverbs 31 contains the intriguing question that this writer has been asked to discuss: “Who can find a virtuous woman?” This chapter of Proverbs is one of the most beloved of the Old Testament and verse ten records the specific question under consideration. The answer to this question will provide insight for and assurance of the happiness God intends to be enjoyed in a marriage. It is obvious from the number of failed marriages in our society today that, most men have either not been interested in finding a virtuous woman, asked the question too late, or did not look for such a woman in the right places. Our materialistic society has conjured up, and advertised widely, superficial images of the kind of woman for which a man should search. The worldly images are based on sensual desires and immoral passions.

It becomes imperative for all of us to get the proper answer to the question under consideration so we can restore the spiritual image of purity in marriage (Warren). Then, the Bible answer ought to be published universally.

THOSE WHO LISTEN TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The context of this question begins with the advice of a mother concerned about her son and the influence that women might have in his life. This mother's advice was obviously heeded and passed on to others because of what is recorded in the first verse of this chapter.

The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings (Pro. 31:1-3).

Godly mothers are always concerned that their sons could marry the wrong kind of woman. They know that, if he gives his strength to a woman who does not embody virtuous qualities, great harm and hurt will be brought into his life (Smith). Parents are charged by God to teach their children to value the instructions of God.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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 (Deu. 6:6-7).

The reason as to why it is so imperative for the parents to consistently and diligently teach God's statutes and judgment to their children is so they will not forget God.

Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons (4:9).

A vivid example of what happens when a generation of children is devoid of knowledge of God is seen in the early history of the Israelite nation.

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Jud. 2:8-10).

Spiritual darkness is always the outcome when there is failure on the part of parents to teach their children how to embody and recognize in others virtuous characteristics of godliness.

The wise man, Solomon, knew that there was nothing more important than to insure that a child be trained properly. He articulates the educational process that is necessary.

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower *is* servant to the lender. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease. He that loveth pureness of heart, *for* the grace of his lips the king *shall be* his friend. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. The slothful *man* saith, *There is* a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets. The mouth of strange women *is* a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein. Foolishness *is* bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, *and* he that giveth to the rich, *shall* surely *come* to want. Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? (Pro. 22:6-21)?

Solomon also warned that men should stay away from ungodly women.

My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways. For a whore *is* a deep ditch; and a strange woman *is* a narrow pit. She also lieth in wait as *for* a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men (23:26-28).

He certainly was not talking about staying away from all women, but rather he issued a warning concerning the wrong kind of women. He contrasted his warning with his declaration of favor on the man who finds a good woman. “*Whoso* findeth a wife findeth a good *thing*, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (18:22). The only way to be able to tell the difference between women of ill repute and virtuous women is to make sure our children are spiritually educated. Every parent must determine to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is

old, he will not depart from it" (22:6). "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). There is no virtue without the revelation of God's will, the implementation of His will in one's life, and the sharing of that will to others (Tit. 2:11-14). This writer is afraid that dark days are ahead for future generations if they are uneducated in righteousness. The greatest treasure parents can give their children is not a life of luxury but to teach them the way of life. God knew Abraham was that kind of parent.

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (Gen. 18:19).

The apostle Paul recognized that Timothy had been taught God's will from his youth, and such knowledge, as well as his *unfeigned faith*, he had learned from his mother and grandmother. "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Tim. 1:5). Those willing to listen to godly advice will benefit from the process of producing, maintaining, recognizing, and desiring virtue.

THOSE WHO LOOK IN THE RIGHT PLACE

If one wants to purchase jewels of high quality and value, he would certainly be wise to look in a jewelry store. Likewise, the man who has been taught the value of finding a virtuous woman will know where to look to find her. If a man desires to have a help meet that is spiritually wise, morally pure, and who has the favor of man and God, he must look among those who embody such virtues.

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (Pro. 31:10-12).

Virtuous refers to "moral strength, good quality, integrity." Boaz found such a woman in Ruth and acknowledged that her reputation was widely known. "And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou *art* a virtuous woman" (Ruth 3:11). Boaz found Ruth in the field lawfully

and energetically gleaning corn to provide care for her widowed mother-in-law.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name *was* Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after *him* in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who *was* of the kindred of Elimelech. And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD *be* with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel *is* this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It *is* the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.... And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and *how* thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.... So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley.... So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law (Ruth 2:1-7, 11, 17, 23).

If a man wants to find a woman who would make a good wife, he must look in the fields of labor where righteous women of great spiritual strength are busy in the service of their Lord. These virtuous women are valued treasures that can only be found in this environment. Unfortunately, today young men have had their minds perverted by being taught to look for women with physical, superficial beauty that they hope will gratify their sensual desires. Only when one knows what kinds of qualities for which they ought to look and where to look for the woman who embodies those qualities will he be able to find a truly virtuous woman. Those who desire a wife of great worth must search through the priceless stones buried in the fields of righteousness "for her price *is* far above rubies" (Pro. 31:10). The man who wants a wife he can trust must look among those fair maidens busy in the field of fidelity. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (31:11-12). The man who wants a wife that is

industrious must look among the tireless toilers in the vineyard of virtue.

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise *is* good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff (31:13-19).

The man who wants a wife who is benevolent to her family must look amidst the crops of opportunistic compassion.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing *is* silk and purple (31:20-22).

The man who wants a wife who brings honor and deserves to be honored must be a participant in the happy harvest of heavenly habits.

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour *are* her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all (31:23-29).

The man who wants a wife who puts the Lord first in her life must be busy working alongside worthy women who excel in righteous reverence and who can expect reward as well as respect.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates" (31:29-31) (Hunt).

THOSE WHO LIVE BY RIGHT PRINCIPLES

The man who finds a virtuous woman and keeps her is the one who recognizes what a treasure he has and who leads the chorus of those expressing appreciation to her and to God.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that*

feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates (31:28-31).

The virtue of a godly woman certainly has a profound effect on the lives all those she comes in contact with but truly in an intimate way on the life of her husband. Yet, it is up to the man as to what kind of person he will be individually. He can either emulate the righteous example of his wife by determining to live by the same righteous principles, or he can mar much of her virtuous influence by living an unrighteous life (1 Pet. 3:1-7). For you see, marriage (like any relationship) will be as successful as the spiritual wholeness possessed by the individuals who give birth to that relationship. It is the individual that must determine to “seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33). It is the individual that has to determine to be obedient to the “will of my Father” in heaven (Mat. 7:21). It is the individual that is to examine himself to see whether he is faithful (2 Cor. 13:5). It is the individual that must “Study to shew [himself] approved unto God” (2 Tim. 2:15). It is the individual that is to be the “earthen vessel” that houses the treasured Gospel message which is to be shared with the world (2 Cor. 4:7). It is the individual that “must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” to give an answer to the deeds done in this body (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:12).

Like the old adage: “An omelet is only as good as the eggs that are in it.” If one of the eggs is rotten, it will spoil the whole omelet. It does not matter that the other egg is good, its goodness is ruined by the rottenness of the bad egg. Such is also the danger of a less than virtuous man being married to a virtuous woman. Solomon states it this way: “He that *hath* no rule over his own spirit *is like* a city *that is* broken down, *and* without walls” (Pro. 25:28).

When Jesus gave the parable describing different kinds of soils, one of the *places* the seed fell was said to be “stony ground.” In giving the interpretation of the parable, the Lord said this was the heart that receives the Word with joy, yet, in times of persecution does not endure because “he hath not root in himself” (Mat. 13:21). It is the root system of a plant that is its source of strength and nourishment. It is the spiritual depth of a person that will shape his life and determine the quality of the fruit he will bear.

All the marvelous qualities of a godly woman cannot change a man who does not have or who chooses not to develop spiritual depth. He will be half of a person and will endanger the spiritual health of his

spouse. There is a great need for men of God who place high value on their good name and spiritual reputation. Such men will heed Solomon's wise words.

A *good* name *is* rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together: the LORD *is* the maker of them all. A prudent *man* foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. By humility *and* the fear of the LORD *are* riches, and honour, and life. Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them (Pro. 22:1-5).

A man who desires a worthy woman is the one who chooses a good name above great riches. "A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (Ecc. 7:1). One's name declares his character. Because of the value of one's name, it should be protected from injury and loss. It is easier to lose one's good name than it is to earn it. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: *so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom *and* honour" (Ecc. 10:1). Our reputation will reflect on our help meet for good or evil. More importantly the value we place on our name will declare how precious the name of Christ is to us (Acts 4:12-13).

A man who has found a wife of pure virtue should be grateful and follow the inspired instructions given by Peter:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

There is no way to declare appreciation for them if one is unwilling to reciprocate their love, kindness, service, and benevolence. There has to be some action on the part of the husband if the virtuous woman he has found is to occupy a place of honor in his life. There must be a willingness to pay a price for that which is of value to us (Vine 486). Like vessels made of precious metal are given a place of honor in a household, so the husband, by conscience choice, should give his virtuous wife a place of honor in his heart and life. His esteem for her should be manifested in his demeanor, his decisions, and his declaration. The following poem by an unknown author expresses wise advice for every husband as to the importance and urgency of communicating his love and care for his wife while he has time and opportunity.

Tell Her So

Amid the cares of married strife,
In spite of toil and business life,
If you value your sweet wife,
Tell her so!

When days are dark and deeply blue
She has her troubles, the same as you
Show her that your love is true—
Tell her so!

There was a time you thought it bliss
To get the favor of one kiss;
A dozen now won't come amiss—
Tell her so!

Don't act, if she has passed her prime
As tho' to please her were a crime;
If ever you loved her, now's the time—
Tell her so!

She'll return, for each caress,
An hundredfold of tenderness!
Hearts like hers were made to bless!
Tell her so!

You are hers and hers alone;
Well you know she's all your own;
Don't wait to carve it on a stone
Tell her so!

Never let her heart grow cold—
Richer beauties will unfold;
She is worth her weight in gold!
Tell her so! (Stauffer 32)

The man who lives by righteous principles will desire, look for, find, caress, and protect the woman who can help him to continue to live in the way of righteousness. We made reference earlier in this manuscript of the recognizable qualities of virtue that Boaz saw in Ruth. It certainly cannot go unnoticed that Boaz also was known for his virtuous qualities of compassion, benevolence, and moral purity. After inquiring who Ruth was and being told she was the daughter-in-law of Naomi who had diligently gleaned in the field to provide for their substance, his comments to her reveals his true character.

And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD *be* with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel *is* this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered

and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: Let thine eyes *be* on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of *that* which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I *am* a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and *how* thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth 2:5-12).

When Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz at the threshing floor and present herself to him as a near kinsman, his reaction gives us insight into his moral purity and benevolent spirit.

And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who *art* thou? And she answered, I *am* Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou *art* a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD, my daughter: *for* thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou *art* a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I *am thy* near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, *that* if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, *as* the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning. And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor. Also he said, Bring the vail that *thou hast* upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six

measures of barley, and laid *it* on her: and she went into the city (3:6-15).

We see in the beautiful love story of Ruth and Boaz that virtue sought ought also to be virtue wrought.

CONCLUSION

“Who can find a virtuous woman?” The one who listens to advice from the right people will know what kind of woman for which they ought to look. The one who looks in the right place will find the right kind of women doing the right kind of things. Virtuous women will surround the one who lives by righteous principles themselves, those who “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33). May we teach all of our young women the importance of living a virtuous life. May we also teach our young men to live by the same virtuous principles and teach them to look for a woman who is known for her virtue.

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“WHOM SHALL I SEND, AND WHO WILL GO FOR US?”

ISAIAH 6:8

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr., was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lla Laline Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College and Southwest State Teachers College. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years. In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home.

In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

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INTRODUCTION

“And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me” (Isa. 6:8).

Can you imagine hearing the voice of Jehovah? Well, the voice of the Lord has been heard on several occasions. What an awesome and terrifying sound! When the children of Israel were at Mount Sinai, the voice of the Lord was heard. The Bible describes the event as follows:

And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled (Exo. 19:16).

Yea, such things were enough to cause the people to be terrified. Let us notice even more.

And mount Sinai, the whole of it, smoked, because Jehovah descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of

the trumpet waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice (Exo. 19:18-19).

Let us notice more about this voice.

And all the people perceived the thunders, and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die (Exo. 20:18-19).

What a terrifying experience! Look again at what happened. “And Jehovah said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven” (Exo. 20:22). We read in Deuteronomy: “Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he made thee to see his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire” (4:36). Notice the interesting question: “Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?” (4:33).

As we continue in Deuteronomy, we read even more of this great event.

And ye said, Behold, Jehovah our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth speak with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of Jehovah our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? (5:24-26).

Later Jehovah tells of how He dealt with His people:

Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses thy servant (Neh. 9:13-14).

GOD HAS A MESSAGE

God has a message, and that message must be delivered. There was a gigantic task to be accomplished. There was earthshaking information from God that must be communicated; it had to be made known. What a responsibility! Not just anyone would qualify to carry and deliver this message; it was a message from the Lord.

Isaiah, God's prophet, realized that he was a sinful man. The vision had placed him in the presence of Jehovah. The sinless holiness of the Lord, no doubt, made the prophet more aware of his own sinfulness. Isaiah then cries out: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts" (Isa. 6:5). The prophet of God, Isaiah, realizes that living in a sinful world will have its effect. Regardless of how hard we try, we do sin. The apostle Paul said: "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). The sinful world has its influence, and we all sin. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Then again, Paul said, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Isaiah realizes his own disobedience to divine law; he is unworthy in the sight of God.

In this vision, Isaiah sees the seraphim above Jehovah. Seraphim is the plural of seraph. There was a host of them. Each one had six wings. One pair of wings covered the seraph's face, one pair covered its feet, and one pair of wings was used with which to fly. These seraphim cried out one to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).

At that time the foundations of the household where Isaiah was standing begin to shake and tremble. The house was filled with smoke. Then the prophet of God, Isaiah, spoke and pronounced his own sinfulness. Suddenly, one of the seraphim flew to the altar, with tongs in his hand, he took a live coal from off the altar. The seraph then touched the mouth of Isaiah with the live coal and said, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin forgiven" (Isa. 6:7).

Now Isaiah's condition has been changed. He has been made clean of his sinful condition, he is sanctified, and he has been set apart. Now Isaiah is qualified to deliver God's message. Then the man of God heard the voice, "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8).

It is important to notice that Jehovah did not conscript a messenger. It was not compulsory, but a voluntary task. Jehovah said, "Who will go?" It is also important to notice that a servant, to be acceptable, must be clean from sin. Notice, what King David said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; And renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10). The apostle Paul said, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Again Paul wrote, “And put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24).

When Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord, he responds. The Lord’s question was: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). Immediately, God’s prophet answers, “Here am I; send me” (6:8).

God reveals to Isaiah some shocking information.

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed (6:9-10).

What a disturbing announcement! God refers to Israel as “this people.” He does not consider them as “my people,” as He had done so many times. Too, Jehovah is sending Isaiah to preach a message to Israel that He knows that they will not hear and heed. In fact, the preaching of the message should cause Israel to have a change of heart, but it was going to do the opposite. How strange! Why preach the message if it will not do any good? Why send the prophet Isaiah to preach a message demanding repentance, when God already knows the people will reject His instruction? God knows that the message will make the heart of the people fat, make their ears heavy, shut their eyes, and they will refuse to obey! Why then send a prophet to waste his time, even endanger his life, when it will accomplish nothing? Oh! It will accomplish something! It will give the children of Israel an opportunity to hear and obey. They are the ones that will make the choice. It is like heat on two different substances. Heat will harden clay, but it will melt wax. The individual makes the difference! God knows that people are different, they will react differently. Each person chooses to react by the guidance of his own heart.

God hardened the heart of Pharaoh:

And Jehovah said unto Moses, When thou goest back into Egypt, see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in thy hand: but I will harden his heart and he will not let the people go (Exo. 4:21).

Did this mean that God took away the free moral agency of Pharaoh? Did God harden his heart so he did not have a choice in the matter? Did God cause him to sin and then condemn him for sinning? Of course

not! Pharaoh had his power of choice. God told Pharaoh, "Let my people go" (Exo. 5:1). Pharaoh had a choice. He could obey God or refuse. Pharaoh made his choice: "And Pharaoh said, Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go" (5:2). God will harden hearts by giving a law. Those who refuse to obey, harden their hearts. Thus God hardens their hearts by the giving of the law.

God knows the hearts of men. Some will obey God; some will not. God knows the different kinds of hearts that men possess. God does not make them have a certain type of heart, but man has free agency to choose what kind of a person he will be. In the parable of the sower, it helps us to understand that men have different hearts (Mat. 13:1-43), but man chooses his own heart. God does not make man of one heart or the other. Man makes the choice himself.

God knew the hearts of the people of Israel. He knew that most of them would refuse to do His will. Yet, they had to be given the power of choice. There would be some who would obey. There was to be a small remnant of Israel left: "Except Jehovah of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Isa. 1:9). This remnant is mentioned in Isaiah 10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 37:4, 31-32; 46:3. The message had to be delivered, even though Israel, as a nation, would reject it. Too, the preaching of the message would reveal the remnant. Those who would obey God would be manifest. The same is true today. There will always be those who will bow in submission to God, but it will not be the majority. Jesus said, "For many are called, but few chosen" (Mat. 22:14).

A LESSON FOR PEOPLE TODAY!

The great apostle Paul wrote, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Again Paul said, "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Surely we can profit from these great questions spoken so many years ago.

GOD HAS A GREAT MESSAGE TODAY!

God has a great message today! That message must be delivered. There is a gigantic task to be accomplished. The message has world-

changing information; all of mankind must have an opportunity to hear and respond. Again the voice of God asks the vital question: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8).

The masses of humanity, no doubt, will not hear the message. Like Pharaoh of old, most people will say, “Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto his voice... I know not Jehovah” (Exo. 5:2). Yet, the message must be proclaimed to the whole world that the small remnant will be revealed. There will be those who will hear the message and obey it. That number, though it may be few, is scattered throughout the whole world. Therefore, the message must be proclaimed to the whole world to sieve out that few who will respond favorably by obeying. Now the great question is: “Who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). Who will make the vital message known? God has placed this great task upon the remnant, the few, who have accepted the pronouncement. They in turn must proclaim the message.

MESSENGERS MUST BE MADE FREE FROM SIN

Before Isaiah could be a proclaimer of God’s message, he had to be cleansed from sin. The seraph had to touch his lips with the live coal before he could be a herald of God’s Word. Likewise, the messenger today must be sanctified, made clean, before he can manifest openly God’s will.

The apostle Paul had to be made clean before he could be an Apostle to the Gentiles. He was on his way to Damascus to find Christians, to bring them bound to Jerusalem. This zealous Jew was in sin and did not realize it. Luke records his conversion in Acts 9, 22, and 26. After he saw the great light and heard the voice of Jesus. The Son of God told him to go into the city and it would be told him what to do. After he had fasted three days, Ananias, a devout Christian, came to him. This minister said, “Brother Saul, receive thy sight” (Acts 22:13). Immediately he was healed. Then Ananias said:

The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:14-16).

Though Saul was very religious and very zealous for his religion, he was sinning in the rejection of Jesus and the persecuting of Christians. His own testimony proved that he was in sin:

I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them. And punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities (Acts 26:9-11).

God had a great message for the Gentiles! He chooses Saul to be the apostle to preach to them.

But when it was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; straightway I conferred not with flesh and blood (Gal. 1:15-16).

The Lord told Ananias, when he was reluctant to go to Saul because of the evil he had done to the saints: "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Later Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, made known to the Romans that he was an Apostle to the Gentiles: "But I speak to you that are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry" (Rom. 11:13).

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). He also informed the young evangelist Timothy: "Whereunto I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth, I lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tim. 2:7). In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he wrote, "But the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me; that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17).

Paul, the apostle, personally made this confession:

And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of Stephen thy witness was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting, and keeping the garments of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles (Acts 22:19-21).

The Bible makes known that Paul was indeed chosen to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Likewise, Peter was the Apostle to the Jews. Let us consider what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

When they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with *the gospel* of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9).

THE QUESTION IS CLEAR TODAY

The voice is loud and clear today as it was centuries ago! “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Why are there so few Isaiahs today responding? Most of the world’s population is lost. Also, most of the lost world lives outside the United States of America. Where are the Isaiahs today to say, “Here I am, send Me.” Where are the congregations that will respond, “We will send, if you will go.” Preachers must be sent:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14-15).

Congregations should be pleading for men to go to the mission fields. They should be ready to support fully men who are qualified. Men should make an effort to qualify to carry the message of Jesus Christ.

It appears that the church has the cart before the horse. Men who are qualified to preach and handle problems in the mission fields are not sent. The most qualified either will not go, or congregations will not send. Seasoned, learned men are holding down pulpits of large well established congregations. It is usually the young enthused Christians, who are willing to go into all the world to preach, but they usually are not well grounded. They have not had experience in dealing with congregational problems. They are not educated enough with the difficulties of preaching; so they are not able to adjust to all the changes of customs that come with culture shock. Many leave the mission fields after a short time; they have wasted a lot of money and have nothing to show for their efforts. Many young missionaries return home so discouraged that they never preach again, and not a few quit the church.

Why do not seasoned, well adjusted, qualified preachers go to the mission fields? Why do not elders send their well-grounded preachers to do mission work? They are qualified to meet false teachings. They are certainly better qualified to adjust to culture shock than some young man out of college or preacher training school. Elders of large well-established congregations should take young preachers that are just getting started, put them under their wings, and train them. If elders are truly qualified, they can preach and teach their congregations. They can send and fully support their well-qualified preacher and nurture and train a young man, while he is working with a large, well established congregation.

A modern Isaiah must realize the difficulty of preaching to those who are supposed to be God's people. The church has many of the most wonderful people in the world. It also has some of the meanest, most ungodly, people claiming to be Christians. Preachers must herald the message of the Master, regardless of how it will be received or rejected. God knows that most of humanity will not hear and obey His Word. Still, the message must be proclaimed! "Who will go for us?" God's question faces every child of God. Will we go to our families? Will we go to our neighbors? Will we go to all the nations of the earth? How many of us will respond to our Heavenly Father? Will we say, "Here am I send me"? Will we really go? Someone said, "If Isaiah had known what hardship, what abuse, what rebellion, what persecution, what suffering, he would go through for being God's messenger, would he have volunteered?" Regardless of the answer, we might surmise, Isaiah fulfilled his obligation. What about us? More importantly, what about me?

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

“WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?”

ISAIAH 21:11

Jerry Murrell



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INTRODUCTION

The theme assigned for this chapter is very timely. Instead of being watchmen on the wall, many Christians have their heads buried in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. Like Sergeant Schultz, they “see nothing” and are proud to tell you that they “know nothing.”

The assigned text comes from Isaiah 21:11. It comes in the midst of a section in which Isaiah is pronouncing judgment against foreign nations (13-23). This section follows on the heels of the pronouncement of judgment against Assyria (10) and the prediction of the coming Messiah (11). God, in His Word, has always combined messages that show both His goodness and severity (cf., Rom. 11:22). In uncertain times, God's people need watchmen to provide warnings and answers.

CONCEPT OF A WATCHMAN

“Watchman” comes from the Hebrew *sopeh* and *somer* as well as the Greek terms *phylax* and *teron* (Fenshim 1317). The basic definition of *watchman* is “one who keeps vigil, who guards a person or property, usually at night; hence a sentry or keeper of the gate” (Wolf 806).

“Watchman” in the text under consideration (Isa. 21:11) is *shamar*, which is used more than four hundred times in the Old Testament. The basic idea of the root is “to exercise great care over” (Hartley 939). The

first use of this word is translated as *keep* when Adam is told to "dress it and keep it [the garden]" (Gen. 2:15).

One of the roles of a shepherd was to serve as a watchman. *Shamar* is used by Jacob as he bargained with his father-in-law, Laban. Jacob promised that as part of the bargain he would "feed *and* keep [*shamar*]" Laban's flock (Gen. 30:31). No doubt David was acting as a vigilant watchman when he "slew both the lion and the bear" (1 Sam. 17:36). This is not what the hireling would do, since he has no vested interest in the safety of the sheep, he "seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep" (John 10:12).

The concept of a watchman (*shamar*) contains both the idea of watching and protecting. This is the word Cain used when he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper [*shamar*]" (Gen. 4:9). The emphasis on protection is seen as God told Satan concerning Job, "Behold, he *is* in thine hand; but save [*shamar*] his life" (Job 2:6).

When used as a military term, the watchman was to set over the gate and watch for people trying to come into the city (2 Sam. 18:24). After Absalom's rebellion, the watchman told David of two individuals coming into the city. David knew that if they were alone, they must have been returning with news from the battle (18:25-26). When the two runners got closer, the watchman recognized that the first was a supporter of David, Ahimaaz (18:27). So it was the duty of the watchman to report exactly what he saw as soon as he saw it. The watchman was also to give later reports as more facts came into sharper focus.

The same truth is taught by observing another unnamed watchman. A watchman in Jezreel was trying to protect Joram, king of Judah. He first spotted what he characterized as "a company" in the distance. Joram sent a horseman out to greet the *company* (2 Kin. 9:17). That horseman, as well as a subsequent horseman, sent on the same mission, joined with Jehu in the rebellion (9:18-19). The fact that the watchman did not abandon his post to rebel, shows how faithful to his mission a man had to be to be selected as a watchman. The watchman kept looking until he could tell by the manner of the chariot driving that it was Jehu coming, "for he driveth furiously" (9:20). This warning allowed Joram to "make ready" for battle. Though Joram was killed and lost his kingdom (9:21ff), his failure was not caused by his faithful watchman who performed his duty.

This watchman would have been considered faithful, in spite of the military loss, because it was only his responsibility to warn of impending danger. It was then the responsibility of the people who had been warned to prepare for battle. The watchman was to sit in his watchtower and “blow the trumpet” to “warn the people” when he “seeth the sword come upon the land” (Eze. 33:3). Whoever hears the trumpet but “taketh not warning” and is killed in battle, “his blood shall be upon his own head” (33:4). But if the watchman sees an invading army and fails to blow the trumpet, “the people” would not have an opportunity to be warned. If anyone dies as a result of this failure, God said “his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand” (33:6). God went on to apply this analogy of a watchman, to the work of Ezekiel, who served as God’s spokesman (33:7-11). God’s watchman must give God’s people warning from Him (3:17). The responsibility of a watchman is important.

The ideal watchman is God. He is the great watchman that all watchmen should pattern themselves after. This is why the Psalmist said, “Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain” (127:1). One of the characteristics that makes God an ideal watchman is that He does not sleep. The Psalmist said of God, “He that keepeth [*shmar*] thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth [*shamar*] Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (121:3-4). This is the reason that when Jesus went to pray in the garden of Gethsemane, He rebuked His apostles. They had failed to carry out their twofold mission to “watch and pray” (Mat. 26:40-41).

The role of the watchman is neglected among God’s people today. The two main roles of a *watchman* causing problems among God’s people are that we have some watchmen who **fail to watch** and we have some watchmen who **fail to warn**. The two problems that lie at the root of this failure are **ignorance** and **indifference**. Some are not able to distinguish between those who are sent from the camp of the enemy and those who are in the Lord’s army (cf., Eph. 6:10ff). This is true in spite of Paul telling us that we do not have to be ignorant of the devil’s devices (2 Cor. 2:11). Satan has successfully used two tactics to attack the church through ignorance. In the Garden of Eden Satan changed God’s Word (Gen. 3), and in the parable of the sower he stole the Word altogether (Luke 8:12).

Another method that Satan has used to attack the church is **indifference**. The concept of a watchman entails an ongoing battle between the

forces of Satan and the forces of God. However, some do not even know that the battle is ongoing. Others have chosen not to be involved in the battle. Many are spiritual *war protestors*. They spiritually march with signs saying, "Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace" (Jer. 6:14). They *profess* to care more about people (the soldiers) than those who know we are at war, but by their constant negative attitude about those whom they perceive to be negative, they only provided aid and comfort to the enemy.

The watchman must cry out and sound the trumpet when the city is under attack. Some refuse to listen to the warning of the watchman. As Brother Rice often said, "You cannot warn some brethren." They want to silence the watchmen lest they be awakened out of their slumber. They actually desire the kind of watchmen that Isaiah said, in part, led to Israel's downfall. Their "watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber" (56:10). Many of these watchmen are willing to remain silent because they know that times of peace lead to personal economic prosperity and "*they are* greedy dogs *which* can never have enough" (56:11). This description sounds like God wants some men to step up to be faithful and good watchdogs. A watchman who does not warn of impending danger is not only useless to, but also harmful to, the body of Christ.

COMMENTS ON THE TEXT UNDER CONSIDERATION

Isaiah wrote, "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come" (21:11-12). In prophetic literature a *burden* is often used of a message of impending doom. Who is the object of this burden? The text indicates Dumah, but where is this located? Two basic views have been taken: some say this refers to Arabia, and some say this refers to Edom. Those who argue for Arabia point to Dumah as one of the twelve sons of Ishmael (Gen. 25:14).

However, this cry comes from Seir. *Seir* means hairy. Esau was a "hairy" (*seir*) man (Gen. 25:25). Esau moved to "Mount Seir" and from that time, "Esau *is* Edom" (Gen. 36:8)—that is, the descendants of Esau are the inhabitants of Edom. Seir was to Edom what Zion was to Israel. Since the cry comes from Seir (Isa. 21:11), it seems that the burden concerns Edom.

Dumah means silence (Psa. 94:17), and it was sometimes used of the silence of death (Hailey 177). Butler seems to be correct when he argues that *Dumah* “is probably the Hebrew word *A-dom* (Edom—‘red’) which the prophet has used as a pun by removing the *a* sound from the beginning of the word and placing it at the end—*dum-A*” (289). It is interesting that a land whose forefather had not been interested at all in spiritual things has asked a spiritual question. A land that was spiritually silent had been brought to ask spiritual questions by fear of judgment. The land of silence cried out and asked “what of the night?”

The next problem in the text is, “Who is the watchman of this text?” It is clear that in other texts God is the watchman. However, here the watchman clearly seems to be Isaiah, since he provides the answer to the question. This would also agree with God’s having made other prophets, such as Ezekiel, spiritual watchmen (Eze. 3:17). As a watchman, it was the prophet’s role to speak the Word of God to all who needed to hear it (3:17). Edom asked a question; so Isaiah responded to them with a Word from the Lord.

The Edomites asked the question, “Watchman what of the night?” They repeated this same question, which indicates the **urgency** of the question. They had turned to God’s spokesman for information out of desperation. The meaning of the question is, “What part of the night are we at now?” (Delitzsch 384). *Night* was used as a figure for times of trial (cf., Job 36:20). “In times of hostility the dangers of the night were especially feared and the watchman eagerly looked forward to the break of day” (Fenshim 1317). Like a sick man, who can no longer endure the sleepless night, Edom wants to know if their tribulation will soon be over (Delitzsch 384).

Isaiah’s response is very important. He responded by saying, “The morning cometh and also the night” (21:12). This phrase has been variously understood. Butler thinks that the meaning is that morning comes to those who repent and night comes to those who will not repent (290). However, that would have either night or morning coming to Edom, or to one person, but not both. Isaiah indicates that night will be followed by morning which will be followed by night again. Delitzsch seems to be correct in his understanding that Isaiah is saying that, “Even if the morning dawns, it will be swallowed up again directly by night” (385). Life will be better for the Edomites for a while, but then a worse time will come.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE TEACHING OF THE TEXT

God's will for man does not change. He has always required his people to both *watch and pray*. In Nehemiah's day, the wall of Jerusalem had to be built. Nehemiah described the situation as follows: "For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and *so* builded. And he that sounded the trumpet *was* by me" (4:18). Each person was involved in building the wall, but he also had a sword to defeat his enemies. Nehemiah had a watchman stand beside him so the call could come forth to battle when the enemy attacked. The people neither stopped building nor fighting; they did both at the same time.

This author used to believe that the time would come when the problems in the church would be over, and we could finally get back to expanding the borders of the kingdom. However, this is not part of God's plan. Notice what Peter said:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction (2 Pet. 2:1).

Peter did not say that for a time there would be false teachers in the church and finally they would go away so that the church can return to its mission of taking the gospel to the world (Mat. 28:18-20). The work of defending and extending the influence of the Gospel must be done at the same time. One preacher of the past said that there are three kinds of churches: those getting over problems, those in problems, and those about to have problems. The same could be said of the brotherhood as a whole.

Look back at the first century church. There were some who were trying to add the law of Moses to the Gospel of Christ. These brethren were defeated in open discussion (Acts 15), yet much of the New Testament had to be devoted to fighting this battle on a church by church basis (cf., Galatians). They did not realize that the law of Moses was no longer in force, and they had fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). There were some who were claiming to be apostles when they were not apostles (2 Cor. 11:13). There were some who denied that Jesus would return (2 Pet. 3:1ff). There were some who taught that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim. 2:18). All of these false teachers and more were present in the first century church.

This being the case, we should not be surprised when Rubel Shelly says that the law of Moses has not been abrogated. We should not be

surprised when we hear that Don Finto has made the claim that he is an apostle. We should not be surprised when we hear that Max King is teaching that Jesus will not literally return and that the resurrection is past already.

The church's problem with false teachers did not cease after the first century. As Peter said, "There shall be false teachers" among us (2 Pet. 2:1). As Alexander Campbell was peaching all over the United States and trying to turn people toward the ancient order of things, there were internal problems. Barton W. Stone from the beginning seemed to profess a form of Arianism. After persuasion by Alexander Campbell, Stone changed his view and began to use the language of Scripture to talk about Jesus.

Soon there was controversy concerning the use of a missionary society to evangelize the world. Brethren argued that this was unscriptural because the church was God's missionary society. Before this controversy was over, some began to add mechanical instruments of music to their worship to God. We fail to realize that from the time they were introduced in Midway, Kentucky, to the time when the 1906 census recognized the split that had already taken place was more than fifty years. That battle took place from church to church and was heart-rending in every congregation. David Lipscomb was like a watchman who worked hard to save many churches, particularly those in the South, from this apostasy.

However, controversy did not end there. There had already begun a debate concerning the purpose of baptism. David Lipscomb argued that baptism to *obey God* was scriptural while others argued that one must understand the **purpose** of baptism for it to be effective. Austin McGary began *Firm Foundation* in 1884 to combat Lipscomb's teaching that he characterized as "shaking in the sects." Like a watchman, McGary sounded the warning to a sleepy brotherhood through the pages of the *Firm Foundation*. After some debates, such as the Tant-Harding debate, McGary's teaching eventually won the day, but this did not end all controversy in the Lord's church.

Before the last controversy was over, the next controversy began. R. H. Boll had begun to teach Premillennialism. By 1915, he lost his position as the front page editor of the *Gospel Advocate* because of this false doctrine. While there are few today who would claim to be churches of Christ who teach this doctrine, when the controversy began, no one knew whether this would be the case or not. Boll was a very

influential writer and began his new magazine, *Word and Work*, to spread his doctrine. Men like Foy Wallace stood as a watchman on the wall of Zion and said, "This shall not pass." After the Wallace-Neal debate, the churches who still accepted this doctrine were few in number and were quickly isolated.

By the time the debate over Premillennialism was over, another controversy was brewing. The doctrines that have come to be known as Anti-ism was begging to gain steam. Some who lived through this era say that it appeared for a while that this doctrine would sweep the whole brotherhood. The editorial stance of B. C. Goodpasture, in the *Gospel Advocate*, and the debating skill of Guy N. Woods caused many who had started down the path of anti-ism to turn back to the truth.

However, before this controversy was over, the liberals began to raise their heads. At first, a few former Antis, like Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketherside, began to push these ideas. No one thought this could go very far. Then a few more people decided to change the image of the church by slowly changing what was taught. Many papers were started, some very far to the left, from the misnamed *Integrity* to Jimmy Lovell's *Action*, to those closer to the middle of the road such as *Twentieth Century Christian*. Ira Rice began to sound the alarm about Lovell and others in the pages of *Contending for the Faith*. Roy Hearn and Franklin Camp started the old *First Century Christian*, in part, as an answer to *Twentieth Century Christian*. Unfortunately, these watchmen have passed from this life before the battle was over.

Will you not rise up as a watchman on the wall of Zion? Are you ready to wear a sword on your hip as you build the walls of Zion? The first century church fought false doctrine in every place it reared its ugly head as well as preached the Gospel to the whole world in one generation (Col. 1:6). Does God expect any less of us? If you see all of the controversy in the church and desire to call out to God's spokesman: "Watchman, what of the night?" (Isa. 21:11), the answer is still the same. "The morning cometh, and also the night" (21:12).

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“WERE THEY ASHAMED WHEN THEY COMMITTED ABOMINATION?” JEREMIAH 6:15; 8:12

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PREFACE

This author is more than grateful to the Bellview elders (my brothers in Christ and good friends) and to brother Hatcher (my special friend) for the challenge to submit this material based on Jeremiah’s question: “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?” If ever there were a *cutting-edge* question, Jeremiah’s is and is as applicable today as in the moment that that ancient prophet wrote it. Jeremiah’s peers were neither ashamed nor could they blush (Jer. 6:15). Is there one left in America (or the world) who can blush at the abominations committed in this country? Let us all study this issue and see.

INTRODUCTION

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD” (Jer. 6:15).

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD” (Jer. 8:12).

The discerning reader will note that the two verses above from Jeremiah’s pen (actually Jeremiah’s amanuenses—Baruch) are virtually the same. The Hebrew practice of repetition was usually for emphasis and seems to be the reason for the iteration here (Cheyne 215).¹ The southern kingdom of Judah had become an unfruitful vine and barren fig tree in Jeremiah’s time and had earned severe warning from God that Judah would lose all her blessings (8:13). Therefore, Jeremiah must emphatically remind that ancient southern kingdom of her fate.

The study here will ask, in the first place, the question as to why Jeremiah inquired about that nation’s shame as a background study to the remainder of the included material. In the second place, a word study of *ashamed* and *blush* will be given. In the third place, applications will be made concerning today’s world.

ASHAMED? THE BACKGROUND

During the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (around 629 B.C.) God’s call came to Jeremiah (1:2-3). The prophet’s work continued, even after the Babylonian’s destruction of Jerusalem (587 B.C.), among that city’s ruins, and later in Egyptian exile (25:3; 40:1; 44:1). Jeremiah was informed by God that the destruction of Judah would come “from the north” (Babylon—1:11-16) and the prophet had to bring those reports of doom to his people (1:17).

Five years after Jeremiah’s call to the prophetic office, a copy of the law of Moses was discovered by those on King Josiah’s staff, and that king **tried** to reform Judah (2 Kin. 22-23), but his efforts were less than successful (Cheyne 293).² Jeremiah, therefore, became the herald of the dissolution of the ancient Jewish monarchy of Judah, a nation spared from Assyria (2 Chr. 33:11ff) only to be conquered by Babylon.³

After Josiah’s reign, Shallum ruled for just three months; his fate was prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:11-17). Jehoiakim then reigned for eleven years,⁴ and during his fourth year the famous battle at Charchemish was fought (606 B.C.), with Nebuchadnezzar winning that fight and making Babylon the ruler of the known world. Nebuchadnezzar then besieged Jerusalem and took away Jewish captives in 606 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C. Jeremiah, contrary to the false prophets, had already

properly foretold of the seventy years of Babylonian captivity for Judah (606-536 B.C.—Jer. 20:10).

Much like king Hezekiah who had Isaiah’s help, Josiah had Jeremiah, but the latter prophet had a more difficult task than Isaiah’s. Isaiah did have a zealous remnant who could find deliverance, but Jeremiah spoke to a people whose religion was merely external (cf., 7:1-8). The prosperity of Jeremiah’s time had come to be *proof* to that Jewish nation that God looked favorably on it, but most of those ancient Jews had very little concept of the spiritual nature of religion; so their prophets cried “peace, peace,” where there really was no peace (6:14). Those people loved the messages of the false prophets because the peoples’ religion was nothing but ritualism, which in those ancients is one of the more important concepts behind the question investigated in this essay. A people whose religion is merely **external** can hardly be expected to be **ashamed** of their iniquities and abominations, for they would not recognize such iniquities in the first place.

The prospects held out by Jeremiah seemed gloomy to an outwardly prosperous people, and his prophecies cost Jeremiah a great deal. Since he was constantly threatening captivity (“the sword, the famine, and the pestilence”—cf., 24:10) and the destruction of the temple (7:12), Jeremiah’s preaching **became intolerable** to the ritualistic Jews:

O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, *say they*, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, *saying*, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD *is* with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: *their* everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers (20:7-13).

Yet, Jeremiah stuck with God’s message and urgently counseled the people to surrender to Babylon, for which preaching the prophet was

imprisoned (Jer. 38:24-28). The question, “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?” came early in the prophet’s work, but the people of whom he asked **never** changed. They were **never** ashamed, neither could they **blush** (6:15; 8:12).

To preach to a people **obstinate** in wickedness is to preach messages to those who “hold fast [by] deceit,” who “refuse to return” (8:5). Such are backsliding individuals in a **perpetual** manner who are covetous liars even from the least to the greatest inclusive of the religious leaders (6:13). Imagine a people who cannot “speak aright” and who turn to evil as a “horse rushing into battle” (8:6)! Such folks **forget** about God’s justice, and refuse to remember that a judgment day is coming (8:7). What irony that those Jews **claimed** God’s Word and spurned its precepts (8:8-11)! What was the result of their impenitent rush to do evil? They could not blush and were never undone by their iniquities (8:12).

One of the more pertinent passages from Jeremiah eight is verse eight: “How do ye say, we are wise and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.” Keil writes about Jeremiah 8:8 thus:

The words are not to be limited in their reference to the efforts of the false prophets, who spread their delusive prophecies by means of writings: they refer equally to the work of the priests, whose duty it was to train the people in the law, and who, by false teaching as to its demands, led the people astray, seduced them from the way of truth, and deceived them as to the future. The labours both of the false prophets and of the wicked priests consisted not merely in authorship, in composing and circulating writings, but to a very great extent in the oral teaching of the people, partly by prophetic announcements, partly by instruction in the law; only in so far as it was necessary was it their duty to set down in writing and to circulate their prophecies and interpretations of the law. But this work by word and writing was founded on the existing written law, the Torah of Moses; just as the true prophets sought to influence the people chiefly by preaching the law to them, by examining their deeds and habits by the rule of the divine will as revealed in the Torah, and by applying to their times the law’s promises and threatenings. For this work with the law, and application of it to life, Jeremiah use the expression “style of the Shoferim,” because the interpretation of the law, if it was to have valid authority as the rule of life, must be fixed by writing. Yet he did not in this speak only of authors, composers, but meant such as busied themselves about the book of the law, made it the object of their study. But inasmuch as such persons, by false interpretation and application,

perverted the truth of the law into a lie, he calls their work the work of the lying style (pen) (175).

A further reason, then, that the people were not ashamed and unable to blush is that those who should have taught the Word of God to the people used the text but misapplied and perverted it (cf., 2 Pet. 3:16-18)! Legion are those who insist that “their preacher” “uses the Bible” when in reality, as the scribes of ancient Judah, he misuses Holy Writ!

Perhaps the background to this study can best be summarized with two thoughts: (1) The people were intent on their prosperous life-style and had no time for truth; (2) The leaders said that they taught God’s Word when in reality they perverted it. Combining such covetousness and perversion produced a people who were unashamed of evil.

ASHAMED: DID THEY BLUSH? (A WORD STUDY)

The interrogation in the Authorized Version is as the title of this manuscript: “Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?” (Jer. 8:12; 6:15). The translation as a question certainly is equivalent to the meaning of the context since there seems to be an implied inquiry. Some English translations, however, render it: “They are brought to shame” since the Hebrew verb is *Niphal* in 8:12 but *Hiphe*l (prophetic perfect) in 6:15 (Cheyne 146). At Jeremiah 8:12 one reads *hiblem*, but at Jeremiah 6:15 there is *hablim*, and so the sense seems to be that with certainty the people will surely be brought to shame because they were not at all **ashamed** (*bosh-calām*), nor could they **blush** (*calām*) (*Hebraica Biblica*).

Bosh, above with *calām*, denotes paleness caused by fear and thus carries the idea of confusion and consciousness of disgrace or ignominy (Wilson 22). A natural son can cause such shame (Pro. 10:5), as well as a national son (Isa. 29:22). When the Hebrew is *ad-bosh*, the idea is importunity which exceeds the bounds of reason and modesty (Jud. 3:25; 2 Kin. 2:17). Gesenius adds that the origin of *bosh* should be sought in terms of **terror** (109).⁵ Thus, men with true shame (*bosh*) would live in terror of disobeying God. In fact the enemies of God’s people are to be *ashamed* (put to flight) after their efforts are defeated (Psa. 6:10; c.f., Psa. 25:3; 31:17; 35:4).

Calām probably meant “to wound” and always referred to reproach, or a state of disgrace (Wilson 22). *Calām* “expresses a higher degree of shame than *bosh*, with which *calām* is often joined,” as in Jeremiah

6:15 and 8:12 to define a twofold shame, internal and external (Wilson 22). Note the use of *calam* by Isaiah: “They shall be **ashamed**, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together *that are* makers of idols” (Isa. 45:16). One brought to shame from public **divine** punishment was said to be *calam* (Eze. 16:52; Jer. 14:3), and one publically disgraced in other ways was *calam* (Num. 12:14; 2 Sam. 10:5; 19:3). The English translators of Proverbs 25:8 called such disgrace *infamy* (Adeney 170).⁶

From the above word study one thus learns that the mindset that cannot blush is so hardened by sin that there is no presence of a sense of iniquity. Men reach such a stage by improper training of the conscience (1 Tim. 4:1-3), by persistence in sin (cf., Judas), by the loss of respect for God’s Word (Jer. 8:8), and by the forfeiture of moral character and decency. As in Judah’s day, so in 2003, people are in need of shame and the ability to blush, for man in general has indeed lost his sensitivity to sin.

ASHAMED? APPLICATION TODAY

The list of abominations committed in today’s world is of excessive length. There is fornication, abortion, homosexuality, profanity, twisted truth, murder, covetousness, lying, drunkenness, pornography, and general disobedience to God. A brief look at some problems follows.

Years ago, when W. B. West, Jr., was living, this author and he entered a Morrison’s cafeteria to enjoy lunch together. While standing together in the foyer, we heard a lady trying to introduce her male companion to a lady friend she met while exiting. That lady said, “This is my, my...live-in friend.” All three **laughed** as they left the restaurant. However, brother West and I blushed!

Social statistics indicate that fornication (which is the sin involved above) is epidemic in America with multitudes of those who have sired children unmarried and uncaring.⁷ There are 11.9 million single parents in America of whom 9.8 million are women with fifty-six percent of such homes having **only** one adult in them (Single Parent Central). Thirty-two percent of all births are to single women, and the problem for the past ten years has exploded three times faster than the number getting married so that thirty-five percent of **all** children are illegitimate (Single Parent Central). The actual number of persons who never marry has grown from 21.4 million in 1970 to 44.9 million in 1997, and the divorce rate has increased four times over that same span of years with

2.5 million divorces occurring in America every year (Marital Status 1). In 1970 there were 523,000 unmarried couples living together, but in 1997 over four million couples cohabited without benefit of marriage! Thirty-eight percent of all children live with divorced parents; thirty-five percent live with a parent who never married; nineteen percent live with a separated parent; four percent live with a surviving parent; and four percent live with a parent whose spouse is *elsewhere*. Sixty percent of all children of single parents live in a large urban area. The average male in America divorces for the **second** time at age forty-two and the average female at thirty-nine (Single Parent Central). Who blushes about all this illegitimacy and fornication? Actually books are written about how such single parents are “heroines” and “heroes” in society.⁸ However, fornication is still listed in God’s Word as a sin of the flesh which sin will keep one out of heaven (Gal. 5:19-21).

A second shame, abortion, or rather murder of the unborn, is so casual in America that parents are often faced with deciding whether they even want a conceived child. Who is ashamed of such abominable thinking? The following is the historical data concerning abortion from 1970-1995 (Abortion):⁹

1. Numbers of abortions: This is the total number of legal abortions reported in the U.S.:
 - a. 1970 to 1980: The number of abortions increased every year.
 - b. 1981 to 1982: The number stabilized, increasing by only about 0.2% a year.
 - c. 1983 to 1990: Significant growth resumed, with increases of up to 5% per year
 - d. 1990 to 1995: The number decreased every year.
2. Abortion ratio: This is the number of legal abortions per 1,000 live births.
 - a. 1970 to 1984: The ratio increased, reaching a peak of 364 in 1984
 - b. 1985 to 1995: The ratio decreased steadily to 311 in 1995
3. Abortion rate: This is the number of legal abortions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years:
 - a. 1970 to 1980: The rate increased from 5 to 25.
 - b. 1981 to 1992: The rate remained stable at 23 to 24.
 - c. 1993 to 1995: The rate steadily declined to 20.

Death rate as a result of abortion: “...*deaths [from complications related to legal induced abortions occurred rarely.*” There were fewer than one death due to complications per 100,000 legal abortions. From 1993 to 1997, the case fatality rate was 0.6 deaths per 100,000 abortions. This is much lower than the rate of maternal deaths for

completed pregnancies. Having a legal abortion is safer, on average, than completing the pregnancy. Abortions that are performed early in pregnancy lead to far fewer complications than abortions done later.¹⁰

Notice that the ungodly have made abortion safer than pregnancy. The highest number of abortions (July 1999 data) were in California where 39 of every 1000 births were terminated and the lowest was Wyoming with 2 per 1000. Worldwide (July 1999) about 46 million women had abortions each year which is twenty-two percent of the 210 million annual pregnancies ("abortion"). However, "were they ashamed" by such murder? Some *religious* leaders have even encouraged this heinous practice as a "woman's right to choose." What choice does the unborn have, and who is ashamed for that dead baby? Certainly multitudes are indifferent toward the killing of the unborn.

A third shame and disgrace, homosexuality, is severely condemned in Holy Writ but is defended by the courts and by society. One wrote: "Viewing gay and lesbian persons as 'different' types of people, born to be homosexual, with no other options open to them, and viewing the gay or lesbian person in the context of the radical sexual revolution of the past 30 years, modern western culture is taking a view of homosexuality that is unique in the history of man" (Medinger).¹¹ The Bible does not record any *myths* about homosexuality, but does clearly condemn such as sin (c.f., Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). However, to condemn homosexuality in American society is becoming, not a matter of shame, but of legal difficulty. Bill Clinton and Ted Kennedy have announced that laws need passing that will stop such "hate mongering" toward homosexuals, and the state of Pennsylvania already has such an ordinance. Will preachers soon be arrested for heralding Romans 1:26-27, or will society learn to blush at gay obscenities?

Some statistics about homosexuals and lesbians show that forty-one percent have attempted suicide and another twenty-eight percent have had *serious* thoughts about self-destruction (Washington State).¹² In Los Angeles twenty-five to thirty-five percent of street youth are homosexual, and in Seattle that number is forty percent (Los Angeles).¹³ Eighty percent of homosexuals report emotional isolation, cognitive isolation, and a feeling of being *different* (Hetrick and Martin 25-43). Are homosexuals just genetically *that way*? No! Every year new studies arise purporting to show pre-natal causes of homosexuality, each of which is conducted by a professed **homosexual** researcher

(Medinger). No heterosexual scientist has ever replicated such studies, and it is now known that only twenty-six percent of children at age twelve are uncertain about their sexuality; that figure declines to only five percent at age seventeen (Medinger). The *unsure* percentage for **all** ages is only about ten percent, and since homosexuals only make up at most about three percent of the population (if left alone without perverse interference), over ninety-seven percent of all children will be heterosexual (Medinger).

Furthermore, homosexuals **can** change:

Despite the 1973 deletion of homosexuality as a **disorder** [emph. mine—K.M.] in the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM III, many professional therapists continue to treat homosexually oriented people who want to change and [the therapists, K.M.] find excellent results. Masters and Johnson reported a 71.6 percent success rate after a 6-year follow up. Mayerson and Lief experienced a 47 percent success rate with a follow up of four years. Gerard van den Oardveg found that among 101 clients, sixty-five percent experienced a “radical” or “satisfactory” change (Medinger).

Homosexuals are sinning and should be ashamed. Such a perversion is also **not** benign. Children are molested, multiple partners are engaged (Medinger), and souls are lost. Who is ashamed? In fact who is disgusted with such behavior?

A fourth societal abomination has to do with speech. The apostle Paul commanded that “no corrupt communication” should proceed from a Christian’s mouth (Eph. 4:29). Hopefully, Christians do avoid profanity, but it is more than obvious that the world can curse without the slightest bit of shame. Movies and television are even rated as to *adult* language, which means that a whole lot of swearing will occur. Worse is the everyday speech of the majority who use the Lord’s name as an interjection as if He could not hear. “My ____!” has become as common as hello in this society and many just substitute heck, darn, gee, gosh, golly, et al., and think they are not cursing. Well, such language is hardly *adult*, but is more nearly related to ignorance. Who does blush, however, when such language is used? Often one even hears of a *Christian* who attended an “R” rated movie and then excused himself by saying that he paid little attention to the foul language. If such a *Christian* cannot see the abomination, how will the world?

In the fifth place one must mention the twisted versions of the Bible and the perversions of truth heard from pulpits and in classrooms

everywhere. Even members of the church seem to see no shame in using material that is integrated with error nor in listening to those who propagate error. Remember that one of Jeremiah's explanations about the abominations of his day was that error was being taught, especially by the religious leaders (Jer. 8:8). Few modern English versions of the Bible are standards suitable for authoritative study, yet brethren love to use these error-filled texts. Space will not permit a discussion here of all of the false teachers mounting pulpits in churches of Christ and of all the hearers who have no shame in hearing such error.¹⁴

Sixth, besides the overt sins of murder and lying (the author lives in the murder capital of America—Memphis, Tennessee), what about **covetousness**? Who is really ashamed of the greed rampant in America, said greed being proven by litigation results, lotteries, gambling, and the lack of real giving even in the church. Covetousness is idolatry or worship of self and money, causing one to steal from God Himself (Col. 3:5; Mal. 3:8-12). The dollar is worshiped more than God, and even dogs and cats in this country get more money than the church does! May all be ashamed of this pagan love for cash and even learn to blush when not giving enough (1 John 3:17; Eph. 4:28).

A seventh abomination of which all should be ashamed is drunkenness or drug abuse. As these two sins have flourished in this nation, a mountain of statistical evidence **and** research has been accumulated. The challenges to treat an alcoholic or drug abuser always have to deal with denial by the user who, because of the dependency, **cannot** be ashamed of his condition. The overwhelming abomination of these sins costs industry \$500,000,000.00 (billion) dollars per year with forty-seven percent of on-the-job injuries related just to alcohol, not counting drug abuse. The latest figures list 13 million **known** alcoholics and another 12.5 million who are "heavy drinkers." One estimate says that drug addiction has a price tag of \$276,000,000.00 in law-enforcement costs alone—or about \$1000.00 for every person in America per year. The dollar amount spent on drug treatment programs, however, is incalculable (Alcoholism Statistics)! The wisdom writer envisioned such sorrow when he wrote: "Wine *is* a mocker, strong drink *is* raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" and "who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine" (Pro. 20:1; 23:29-20).

Drunkenness and drug abuse know no age, race, nationality, nor social status and, in fact, severe damage is inflicted on every major aspect of living—family, employment, health, and spirituality. Yet, drunks are *funny* (witness Otis Campbell on Andy Griffith), fun-loving, and jovial, are they not? No! They are destructive to self and society and a shame to their families. This abomination slaughters thousands on the highways and kills the spirit of myriads of children reared around the alcoholic and/or drug abuser. So-called “social drinkers” who become dependent **never** would have had they **never** started drinking.

An eighth abomination which should bring extreme shame to all is pornography. Those who use computers are well aware of this intrusion from sexual filth and, in fact, web intrusion protection spending will increase tenfold from \$65,000,000.00 in 2001 to \$700,000,000.00 in 2006 according to the child welfare website (Online Pornography). Pornography is not even allowed as a thought by God (Mat. 5:27-28), but multitudes are addicted to such and even bring it into their homes via videos or cable television. The results of this shameless obsession with sex are seen in increased cases of rape (260,300 reported cases of rape of children under twelve in 1995) with only one-third of all rape victims reporting such violent abuse (Online Pornography). The U.S. Department of Justice has pushed for tougher laws, but the Hugh Hefners and Larry Flynt of this world scream censorship and free speech, and the courts seem to agree. With movie screens, television screens, magazines, books, *adult* stores, and internet flooded with such, who blushes as he drives by? God in heaven must really be long-suffering since He has chosen not to destroy this nation at this date. If God does not end this corruption, will He apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah on the judgment day?

CONCLUSION

Judah was **not** ashamed when she committed her sins, but she **was** brought to shame (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). Her *shame* should have caused her to pale in terror when thinking about her abominations but she did not and ended in captivity. Will this nation ever blush at her fornicating, murdering, drunken, perverted actions, or will she just laugh all the way to judgment? Rudyard Kipling wrote in the words of a teen-age girl who said: “I cannot check my girlish blush; my color comes and goes. I redden to my finger tips—and sometimes to my nose!” Would to God that the world had the naivete of that teenage girl!

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ENDNOTES

¹Some commentators insist that Jeremiah 8:12 is an interpolation, but the prophet often repeated himself (8:14 and 4:5; 8:15 and 14:19; 5:9 and 5:29; 7:16 and 11:14; 1:41 and 6:22; et al). The LXX does not contain 8:10-12 and is the reason for some thinking there was an interpolation. However, there are variances in the wording of the two passages and, thus, no grounds for regarding 8:12 as an interpolation.

²Some think that Jeremiah refers to the incident of finding the law (Jer. 11:1-8), and a number of commentators insist that only Deuteronomy was discovered.

³Several kings reigned during Jeremiah's time: Josiah, Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim (Eliakim), Jehoichin (Coniah, Jechoniah), Zedekiah (Mattaniah). See 2 Kings 23. Josiah was slain by Pharaoh-neco; Jehoahaz was enslaved by Nebuchadnezzar at Hamath and then in Egypt, Coniah was taken into Babylonian captivity.

⁴Because of his wickedness Jehoiakim, who had paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, he died outside the gates of Jerusalem and was given the burial of a donkey (Jer. 22:19).

⁵For examples see Ezra 8:22, 9:26, and Ezekiel 36:32.

⁶Adeney insists that the inability to be ashamed (or blush) is the sin against the Holy Spirit which is “a condition of mind which renders repentance hopeless and persistence in sin certain.” Certainly such a mind set is possible, but actually to sin against the Holy Spirit requires witnessing a miracle (Mat. 12:22-37).

⁷See the National Census Bureau. Internet web site:

<http://www.census.gov/www/population/socdemo/ms-la.html>.

⁸See “About.Com/Single Parents for information on the single parent hall of fame.

⁹The data is from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), which is an agency of the federal government. The CDC has collected data since 1969 and receives information from 52 reporting areas—the 50 states plus Washington D.C. **and** New York City. The CDC issues an annual “Abortion Surveillance” report which contains no information about **illegal** abortions from states where parental consent and notification of parents’ laws exist. The CDC defines a legal abortion as “a procedure, performed by a licensed physician or someone acting under the supervision of a licensed physician, that was intended to terminate a suspected or known intrauterine pregnancy and to produce a nonviable fetus at any gestational age.”

¹⁰There is some evidence that some women **are** traumatized by the process.

¹¹Medinger admits that “I grew up with strong homosexual feelings...but sought to live life as best I could as a Christian man. I am forever grateful that I did not buy into any of the myths described here.... I reached the point at which I was willing to surrender these feelings and desires to God.”

¹²See also Curtis D. Proctor and Victor K. Groze, “Risk Factors for Suicide Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth,” *Social work* 39 (1994): 504-513.

¹³A 1991 report said that forty-two percent of street youth identify as homosexual or lesbian!

¹⁴See: *Changes in the Church of Christ*. Ed. Bobby Liddell. Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1994. *Change Agents and Churches of Christ*. Ed. William Woodson. Athens, AL: School of Bible Emphasis, 1994.

“WHY DO WE SIT STILL?”

JEREMIAH 8:14

David B. Jones



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INTRODUCTION

The godly theme this year is one which is especially precious to us. We love to study the Old Testament. These inspired volumes of treasure contain numerous lessons showing us the grace, wrath, love, and faithfulness of God. Paul wrote of these, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Even though in 2003 we are not under the authority of the Old Testament, it still provides for us countless examples of obedience and disobedience and the rewards and consequences of each. Paul said of these volumes:

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).

Studying great questions from these treasures can provide rich and rewarding nourishment for our hearts.

The question under consideration in this chapter was penned by the weeping prophet, Jeremiah:

Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD (8:14).

Because of their sins, Judah faced punishment by being sent into Babylonian captivity. This was a fulfillment of the promise and prophecy made by God when He led them out of the land of Egypt:

And it shall come to pass, *that* as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see (Deu. 28:63-67).

God had promised His people that, if they rejected Him and turned from Him, He would reject them and turn from them. Over and over they had turned to idols like the people of the land. God sent, time and again, prophets to them trying to persuade them back to Him. Finally, His cup of patience was full, and in Jeremiah's day they would see the wrath of God as He destroyed their city and scattered them among them Babylonians. Earlier in time (721 B.C.), God had sent Assyria against the ten northern tribes and carried them away in captivity (2 Kin. 17). Now in Jeremiah's time God will begin the purging process which will rid Judah of full-scale idolatry. We see in this effort made by God, His grace and mercy as He continued to work out His promise He had made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The fulfillment of His efforts was to be seen when Jesus came, died on the cross, and paid the price for our sins.

The reasons for their backsliding are given by God in the immediate context of our discussion for this chapter: (1) They rejected the Word of God (Jer. 8:9); (2) They were given to covetousness (8:10); (3) They have listened to the false prophets (8:11); (4) They were guilty of immorality (8:12). Because of their impenitent hearts, God was sending them into captivity at the hands of the Babylonians.

With the impending punishment looming on the horizon, the people seem to have come to their senses somewhat and asked the penetrating question: “Why do we sit still?” Basically they ask, “Why do we sit still in the face of destruction?” By their own admission, it makes more sense to go into the fenced cities, that is, cities that have a protection from the coming destruction. Perhaps a degree of salvation may be achieved. There might be some provisions of food and water made available to them if they move where they ought to be in time of danger. It made no sense to sit outside the protection with danger coming. It was perfect logic to go inside the protection as the enemy approached. There was no need to sit still and perish. Theirs was a decision to make as much of an effort as they could under the circumstances to change the situation. They might still perish, but at least they would have made the most diligent effort they could to save themselves.

APPLICATION

When we take this Bible example from the Old Testament and make application to present day circumstances, we can draw some mighty conclusions which ought to motivate us in the twenty-first century.

Why Do We Sit Still Regarding Expanding Bible Knowledge?

Manifold is the number of members of the church who have either stopped or semi-stopped their efforts to increase their Bible knowledge. The Hebrews writer informs us: “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The lack of faith causes one to be displeasing to God. This is a matter of record according to the Scriptures. We must have faith to be accepted by God. The question comes then: “How does faith come?” The inspired Record reveals: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). To have Bible faith, one must have Bible knowledge. Through a study of the Bible we gain faith. Jude exhorts: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (20-21). Notice Jude exhorts his readers to build themselves up on their most holy faith and in so doing they will keep themselves in the love of God. One who is keeping himself in the love of God is one who is keeping the commandments of God: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and

his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). The person who is obeying the commandments of God, building himself up on his most holy faith, and keeping himself in the love of God, will be looking for mercy from Jesus.

A lack of knowledge conversely will cause one to lose his faith and shrink back. Hosea said of his people:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (4:6).

God allowed Assyria to overtake His people in 721 B.C. because His people had rejected knowledge and thus ceased from following after Him with their whole hearts. When we stop studying our Bibles, we will also be overtaken by the Wicked One. Having the Word of God abiding in our hearts causes us to overcome the devil:

I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14).

John wrote to those who had overcome the Wicked One because they had the Word in their hearts. Had they not had the Word in their hearts, then they would not have overcome Satan. Those who are *keeping* themselves by obeying God, provide for themselves protection from evil: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). God has provided for us protection from the devil by hiding the Word of God in our hearts: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11).

Elders and leaders in the church need to continue to study and hide the Word of God in their hearts. Leadership can only be as strong as their degree of faith allows. Their degree of faith is determined by their reliance upon the Word of God. Manifold problems arise when Bible study is neglected by elders in the church. Elders are commissioned by God to feed the flock:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you,

taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

How can an eldership feed spiritual things to the church if their depth of Bible knowledge is shallow? Elders are also commanded to stop the mouths of false teachers:

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Tit. 1:9-11).

To stop the mouths of false teachers, elders need have an absolute standard in their hearts and minds with which they judge the words of teachers. Elders also need courage and compassion to stand in the gap and be heard, but without Bible knowledge it does them no good to attempt a stand. The problems the Lord's church faces today from those who have overtaken many by the great swelling words and fair and simple speeches could have been alleviated years ago if some elder-ships had the knowledge and courage to mark the rising heretics and avoid them as Paul commanded (Rom. 16:17-18). May God raise up a generation of men who have a mind to know and stand for the Word of God again! Why do elders sit still and not study in the face of the rampant apostasy?

Also, parents need to once again place the emphasis on Bible study in the home. Fathers are still charged to lead their family: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). To nurture them in the Lord, fathers must have a working knowledge of the Bible. They need to know the principles which should determine every decision they make in life. They then need to teach this to their children diligently. Under the Mosaic dispensation notice their charge:

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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. 6:5-9).

Moses commanded fathers to teach their children how to please God in every aspect of life. Since the New Testament is built upon better promises (Heb. 8:6-8), does it not make sense that fathers today have as much, if not more, of a charge to teach their children? However, we see today in the church of Christ ignorance running roughshod over many homes. When parents are approached by a concerned eldership regarding the lack of training in their homes, they are told to keep their noses out of their private business. Often these families will run to some liberal congregation or denomination (not really much difference!) so their negligence will not be highlighted. Many problems society faces would be avoided simply if parents once again placed the proper emphasis on planting the seed of the kingdom in their children's hearts. Why do parents sit still and not teach their children?

Why Do We Sit Still Regarding Exposing False Teachers?

The age in which we find ourselves is characterized by those who push for a “live and let live” attitude. Today, those in public places are faced with the pressure of being *politically correct*. That is, they are pressured to guard their words and not say anything which would be construed as being *judgmental* or *extremist* in nature. One cannot point out the sins and errors of others without facing public censorship and being judged as *unloving*. This attitude abounds because of the doctrine of humanism. The Devil has been successful in deceiving a generation to believe there is no such thing as an absolute standard of authority. Civil lawsuits are even brought against some who use this absolute standard of authority, speaking out in public regarding sin and error.

This attitude has also permeated the Lord's church, even among some of her elders. Many are afraid to speak out because they have been influenced by the spirit that works in this world. These elders have forgotten their charge given to them by the Lord. As a result, many congregations have either been split or sold into apostasy. Innocent children in these congregations are never taught the militancy demanded by God. When they leave home and establish their own homes, they drift even further from the principles given to them by God. Their ignorance is enhanced even more in their children, and usually many of this generation even cease from attempting to worship with the Lord's church. They see nothing wrong with denominations and are quick to point out no one should *judge* anyone, but let God be the judge. The truth is: **God gave us the standard which is the judge!!** 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). Since the Word will judge us in the end, and we have the Word today (1 Pet. 1:23-25), does it not make sense that we are to make certain judgments using the Word?

Paul wrote much concerning exposing and avoiding false teachers:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom. 16:17-18).

To whom was this exhortation written? Paul penned this to those called saints in the church at Rome (1:7). The Lord expected them to mark those who taught things which were contrary to sound doctrine and avoid them. If God expected that in the first century, does He not still expect the same thing today? These type teachers are to be avoided for the protection of the body. Their words can infest and inflict corruption to the entire body. Paul spoke of some who used such speech: “And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Notice Paul called their names to Timothy. He also warned of the effects of their words. A canker works from the inside and permeates the entire location where it finds itself. Also Paul pointed out these two had erred from the truth by teaching error. Elders need to once again read this passage and other texts like it so their faith would be restored and they would have the strength to mark and avoid as they ought.

Paul also spoke of others:

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

The peerless apostle had left his young friend in Ephesus with a charge: “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). With warning in hand, names were called so Timothy would know who they were and could watch for them. It is simply amazing that many in the Lord’s church, even elders, criticize

and condemn those who follow the apostle’s words. When names are called, many members today are offended. Some even go out and apologize for what the preacher or elders had to say. May these have the time to repent before they reach eternity!

If false teachers are allowed to operate in a congregation, their words will infect the body. This principle is used by Paul as he dealt with the church at Corinth. They had allowed the fornicator to remain in full fellowship; so the Lord inspired Paul to write them a stern rebuking letter with instructions how to handle him. He was to be delivered to Satan (withdrawn from) so his soul would be saved in the end (provided he repented) (1 Cor. 5:5). Then Paul explains why this important:

Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

Even a little leaven will leaven the whole lump. If we allow false teachers to work among God’s people, the entire body will be affected by their poison. The Lord needs elders who are interested in purging out the old leaven.

We also need preachers who will purge false teachers from the body. Far too many preachers run with those who are either in error or who are not as ethical as they ought to be. Sometimes their company is maintained because of what the errorists can give them or do for them. Often their association is kept because they all have another *group* or school they hate more than they hate and despise evil itself. Either way, those preachers, who willingly turn their heads or make no effort to find out the truth, are inconsistent with the Bible by maintaining fellowship with such. These preachers need to again listen to Paul’s charge 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” (2 Tim. 4:1). “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5). These preachers are charged before God and the Lord Jesus to preach the Word and to make full proof of their work or ministry. Running with those in error or who are unethical is not making full proof of their work. Why do we sit still when it comes to marking and avoiding false teachers?

Why Do We Sit Still Regarding Evangelizing the World?

The church has been charged with teaching and preaching the Gospel to the entire world (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). Those who are lost are lost because they have sinned and have not removed that sin by the blood of Christ. We are told that the blood of Christ washes away sins: "And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5). Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). If we have even one sin and have not removed it through His blood, we are yet in our sins. Thus, it behooves us to get this word to the world. Some believe that, if people have not heard, they will not be judged guilty by God. They reason incorrectly: "God is a loving God and we cannot imagine how a loving God could hold someone accountable who has never heard." This may sound reasonable to the weak and ignorant, but to those who know the Bible, this is faulty reasoning. If God were going to save all who never heard, does it not seem more reasonable that He would have never given mankind His Word? Without His Word, according to these, one is saved. So, if God wants all to be saved (and He does) why give anyone His Word? Why not just let man abide in darkness and ignorance and be saved? The Bible says God wants all to be saved, but on His terms: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Notice that God wants all to be saved but it takes knowledge and repentance. Thus, we must take this knowledge to the world so men can repent and be saved. Why do we sit still and not evangelize?

Many have bought into the idea that all men are not lost who are outside the body of Christ. However, the Bible says that Jesus is the Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23). If Jesus is the Savior of the body, He will save those in His body. All men are reconciled to God in this one body: "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh" (2:16-17). Both Jew and Gentile were to be reconciled to God in one body. This was the mystery which God revealed through His apostles:

Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel (3:4-6).

Notice that they were to be members of the same body. This speaks of the one body and not two or more bodies. The same body is to house both Jew and Gentile. Since, in God’s terms, all men are either Jew or Gentiles, the same body houses all those who are reconciled to God. If the same body houses all those saved (5:23), then there are not housed anywhere else who will be saved. If members truly believed this fact more efforts would be put forth to save those outside the body.

Second, many members have become comfortable in this life and are complacent. These remind us of those in Haggai’s day. Notice the words of the older prophet who was inspired by God to rebuke Judah for not building His house:

Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, *Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD (Hag. 1:3-8).*

Notice that the aged prophet rebuked them for not giving attention to the building of God’s physical house on earth (the temple). Those in his day had concentrated and centered their efforts on their own houses. They were rebuked for neglecting God’s house in lieu of their own selfish energies. Today we are charged with building up God’s spiritual house, the church of Christ:

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:6-9).

We labor with God to build His house, the church (1 Tim. 3:15). Far too many have placed their efforts on making this life comfortable to the abuse and neglect of the church. Far too many spend countless

hours working and making their houses large, spacious, and luxurious while they allow themselves and their families to starve spiritually. They provide physical food for their children but allow them to die of malnutrition when it comes to spiritual truths. As a result the world is not evangelized.

Third, many are just plain lazy, and they do not want to be bothered with the *burden* (as they see it) of taking the time to teach and preach the Gospel.

Fourth, all of these mentioned afore have been ashamed of what Jesus said in His Word. Jesus Himself said:

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

If we are ashamed of what the Word says, Jesus will be ashamed of us on that the last great day. We all must guard against becoming ashamed of the Bible. Some may say, “I would never be ashamed.” When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he mentioned *ashamed* several times. He penned this letter to his good and godly friend Timothy, but it seems Timothy had become somewhat ashamed. We read:

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God (2 Tim. 1:6-8).

Notice that Paul reminded Timothy to “stir himself up” and to be **not** be ashamed. Why would Paul tell him **not** to be ashamed if he had not become at least a little ashamed? Paul went on to say:

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (1:12).

The prisoner of the Lord reminded Timothy that he had suffered many things to preach, and he was not ashamed. By way of example, Paul is trying to encourage Timothy to remain faithful to the charge of preaching. Next, Paul uses another servant as an example to Timothy: “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (1:16). Paul had at one time used Timothy for an example to other brethren (Phi. 2:19-23).

Now, Paul used someone else to encourage Timothy. Paul did not want the Lord to be ashamed of Timothy at judgment. The Lord does not want to be ashamed of people today, but those who are ashamed of Him will be denied entrance into heaven at that day. Why do we sit still when it comes to being ashamed of the Lord and His Word?

CULMINATION

We culminate this discussion by reminding ourselves of the principle stated in Jeremiah 8:14:

Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD.

By inspiration and examination, God is trying to get us today to move forward and not stand still. Interestingly, another example from the Old Testament teaches this same principle. When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, their journey (directed by God) took them to the shore of the Red Sea. When the murmuring and complaining Israelites cried, Moses said:

Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever (Exo. 14:13).

After his remark, God spoke to Moses: “Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” (14:15). Notice that God told them to go forward—He does not want us to stand still today either. He wants us to wage war on all sin, error, and evil. We need to heed to admonition of the Lord through His Word and move forward with our efforts regarding expanding Bible knowledge, exposing false teachers, and evangelizing the world. May God help us to this end.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?” JEREMIAH 37:17

Kevin D. Beard



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INTRODUCTION

As the days of Jerusalem were declining, Jeremiah sat in a cell in the dungeon of Jerusalem. The princes had imprisoned the prophet in anger, having falsely accused him of trying to escape from Jerusalem to go to the Chaldeans. Jeremiah had devoted his life to warning his fellow Jews of the coming destruction at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. He had contended with false prophets who wooed the people with their prophecies of peace. He had struggled against kings who had no regard for the Lord. No one seemed to listen; no one seemed to care. Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” poured out his heart to his people for his God, but there was no positive response. Now the final days of Jerusalem drew near and Jeremiah sat alone in that dirty, damp cell.

Nebuchadnezzar had already taken control of Judah’s government, having deposed the wicked Coniah, replacing him with Mattaniah, Coniah’s uncle, whom he renamed Zedekiah. However, the Babylonian king was not content with control; he was bent on destruction. As Jeremiah had prophesied, this destruction came at the Lord’s command. Under the threat of the impending Chaldean destruction, the weak and wicked Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah as a last resort. “Is there *any* word from the LORD,” he asked the prophet in desperation (Jer. 37:17).

Zedekiah's question was the right one; but why did he ask it? What did he intend to do with the answer he received? What other factors played a role in these events? Though the king did not prove to be sincere and upright in asking for the Word of Jehovah, there are many important things for people today to learn. Using Zedekiah's question as a springboard, we will see from the book of Jeremiah the importance of seeking the Word of the Lord.

THE WORD OF THE LORD IS THE ONLY RELIABLE GUIDE FOR LIFE

Zedekiah's inquiry sounds prudent, when taken at face value. He faced an impossible situation with the world's most powerful, most feared army threatening to destroy his city. In their weakened condition, there was no way the armies of Judah could hope to repel the Babylonian invaders. However, God had promised His people that He would fight their battles for them (Exo. 14:14; Deu. 1:30; 20:4). Other enemies had learned the awesome power of Jehovah to their own destruction. The Assyrians, the powerful, world-ruling nation the Babylonians had destroyed, learned first-hand of the Lord's wrath against those who would seek to harm His people against His will. During the reign of Hezekiah, the Assyrian forces surrounded Jerusalem, intent on capturing the capital city. Though conditions in those days were not quite so bad for the Jewish people as they were during Zedekiah's reign, they still did not possess the military might to repel the attack from the bloodthirsty Assyrians. Hezekiah needed divine intervention. He prayed to the Lord and sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah to beg the Lord's aid. The difference between Hezekiah and Zedekiah was faithful submission. Hezekiah fully intended to do whatever the Lord instructed him to do. Thus, the Lord responded favorably to good king Hezekiah.

Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (2 Kin. 19:32-34).

That night, an angel of the Lord came into the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 men. The next morning, the remainder of the invading army fled in terror.

What Zedekiah did in pretense, and what Hezekiah did in sincerity, we must do today: seek guidance from the Word of the Lord. The world

is full of self-styled experts in just about every area of life: relationships, parenting, finances, religion, etiquette, personal advice, and so on. There are so many of these *experts* that some people may feel overwhelmed, and simply do not know where to turn for reliable guidance. Because of this, everyone would do well to ask Zedekiah's question: "Is there *any* word from the LORD?"

God has not given us specific guidance on every conceivable problem we face, but we do know that whatever issues He has addressed in His Word are absolutely right and reliable. David said:

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether (Psa. 19:7-9).

Look at the lengths to which David went to describe the law of the Lord. It is perfect; it is right; it is pure; it is true and righteous altogether. David believed the Word of the Lord to be absolutely reliable and true through and through. Jesus stated it so eloquently, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Truth never changes. It remains constant from age to age, from culture to culture, from person to person. If God's Word is truth, then whatever it says will always be right which is what makes Zedekiah's question so significant.

The Lord's Word is perfect, true, and right because it comes from the Lord. God is holy (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Sam. 2:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). His knowledge has no limits (Psa. 147:4-5; Isa. 40:13-14; Dan. 2:20-22; Rom. 11:33). It is not possible for Him to lie (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:2). Since God is holy, His Word also must be holy and none can impugn its moral worth. Since God is infinite in knowledge, His Word is completely reliable, for God could not be mistaken or ignorant. Since God is incapable of lying, His Word is absolutely trustworthy, because He could not and would not deceive us. We would expect nothing other than perfection, truth, and righteousness from Him because He is perfect, true, and right.

Human ideas do not always harmonize with divine precepts. The Lord Himself pointed out this truth:

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).

If the Word of the Lord is perfect, true, and right, then someone else's word is imperfect, false, and wrong when it disagrees with the Lord's Word. Because of this, it is utterly foolish to reject the Word of the Lord to follow man's word. The wise man said, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). When faced with questions about life and godliness, we should always ask Zedekiah's question: "Is there *any* word from the LORD?" Peter has already answered that question by telling us that God has given to us "all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). His Word is the only reliable guide for life.

THOSE WHO SEEK THE WORD OF THE LORD MUST SUBMIT TO IT

Zedekiah was not the man Hezekiah was: "He did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Kin. 24:19). Hezekiah had listened to the word of Isaiah; but Zedekiah, along with his servants and the people of the land, refused to listen to the Word of the Lord Jeremiah delivered (Jer. 37:2). Under his leadership and that of his predecessors the people of Judah had reached a level of wickedness that God could no longer tolerate. The time for judgment had come. Was Zedekiah's inquiry sincere? Did he really want to know the Lord's will so he could do it, or did Zedekiah simply hope that the message had changed? Some time before this, Jehovah's word to Zedekiah was bleak.

Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that *are* in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and *against* the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy (21:3-7).

Since that time, the Egyptian army had begun to advance to assist Judah, and the Babylonians suspended their siege of Jerusalem. Zedekiah probably hoped this signaled a change in the Lord's plan. Jeremiah informed him otherwise:

Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained *but* wounded men among them, *yet* should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire (Jer. 37:7-10).

The Lord's plan had not changed because Zedekiah and the people had not changed. The king asked for the Lord's Word, but he had no intention of submitting to that word if it did not please him.

This problem was widespread in Judah. The people followed the king's example of disregarding the Lord's Word. The Lord told Jeremiah that his work would be difficult in trying to warn the people. He said the people would fight against the prophet but would not prevail (1:19). God wanted to warn the people and He wanted them to heed His warning, but the warnings did no good.

To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear *is* uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it (6:10).

There was no one left in Judah who wanted to hear the Lord's Word. They no longer saw it as a blessing, but as a reproach—a thing to be despised. So complete was the people's rejection of the Lord's Word that God said they would respond incredulously when Jeremiah told them of their impending destruction, asking, "Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what *is* our iniquity? or what *is* our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?" (16:10).

Too many people have the same attitude today. They talk about the Lord and listening to His will, but they do not really seem that committed to doing whatever His Word says. The prevailing idea in religion today seems to be that we are at liberty to *interpret* the Bible as we choose and do whatever pleases us, so long as we do these things with the intent of glorifying God by doing them. What those who

approach religion this way fail to recognize is that we glorify God not when we do what we want, but when we do what God wants. Nadab and Abihu serve as excellent examples of this principle. These two men were sons of Aaron and had been properly anointed as priests (Exo. 28:1). These men went into the tabernacle to burn incense before the Lord, but they “offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not” (Lev. 10:1). To some, the source of the fire used to burn incense before the Lord would seem to be a minor detail; perhaps it seemed that way to Nadab and Abihu, too. However, it was not a minor detail to the Lord, because “there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (10:2). What makes this incident so relevant to this discussion is the Lord’s statement immediately following this event: “This *is it* that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (10:3). Why did God destroy Nadab and Abihu? Because they did not sanctify Him nor glorify Him. They included in their service something that God had not commanded, which showed an attitude of irreverence toward God. They did not respect God and they did not respect His commands because they set aside His command regarding the fire for burning incense. Worship and service to God only glorifies Him when it is done according to His command.

FALSE TEACHERS ONLY BRING TROUBLE

False prophets proved to be one of Jeremiah’s greatest obstacles in convincing the people to turn back to God. These counterfeit prophets were abundant, and in public opinion their word outweighed Jeremiah’s, both in number and in the pleasantness of the message. As Jeremiah warned of the coming destruction, the false prophets told the people that no harm would come to them. Of these false prophets the Lord said, “They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace” (Jer. 6:14). The healing these prophets brought to the wounded people of Judah was only superficial. It might have made them feel better, but it did nothing to address the cause of their problem. The false prophets had convinced the people that no harm could come to them so long as the temple of the Lord stood in their midst: “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The

temple of the Lord, *are these*” (Jer. 7:4). Jeremiah constantly warned the people not to listen to the words of these lying prophets:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the LORD (23:16).

However Jeremiah’s warnings fell on deaf ears. From the king to the peasants the people refused Jeremiah and preferred those prophets whose message was pleasant.

No matter how comfortable those prophecies made the people feel, the Lord still brought His will to bear on Judah. To those who trusted in the fact that they had the Lord’s temple He said, “But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel” (7:12). When the children of Israel first inhabited the Promised Land, they put the tabernacle in Shiloh (Jos. 18:1). Though the house of the Lord had been in their land too, the Lord still destroyed Israel because of their wickedness. He promised to do to the temple in Jerusalem what He had done to Shiloh (Jer. 7:14-15). The Lord made it clear that these false prophets did not speak by His authority and that their word was worthless.

Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD (Jer. 23:30-32).

One particularly bold false prophet named Hananiah opposed Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. God had commanded Jeremiah to make a wooden yoke and wear it on his neck as a symbol of the Babylonians’ domination of Judah and the other nations (Jer. 27). Hananiah saw Jeremiah in the temple and said the Lord had told him that He had broken the yoke of Babylon, that the bondage would last only two years and that Jeconiah and all the captives would be returned safely to Jerusalem (28:1-4). After Jeremiah denied this prophecy, Hananiah took the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck, broke it, and declared again that God would break the yoke of Babylon within two full years (28:10-11). To show the danger of the false prophet’s words, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to tell Hananiah:

Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also (Jer. 28:13-14).

Rather than deliverance, the false prophets brought greater difficulty to the people. As for Hananiah, his lies brought destruction for himself. Jeremiah's message to the lying prophet also included a prediction of personal doom: "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD" (28:16). Hananiah died just two months later.

Religious teachings are not wholesome simply because the teacher claims that those teachings are from God. Whether the teacher has been deceived or is a deceiver, his claims do not prove the authenticity of his message. The Holy Spirit commended the people of Berea because "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). People today ought to follow the same procedure.

Listening with a ready and open mind is crucial in learning. The Lord pronounced a blessing on those with this attitude (Mat. 13:16). In the Parable of the Sower Jesus emphasized the importance of the heart's condition in receiving the Word. Those people represented by the "good ground" are those who, having "honest and good hearts," heard the word, kept it, and brought forth fruit (Luke 8:15). One who closes his mind does not possess an honest and good heart that is receptive to the Word. We must always work to maintain an attitude of openness and willingness to learn. Closing the mind and heart leads to arrogance and self-righteousness. This problem prevented the Pharisees from seeing that they were blessed to listen to the Son of God. Jesus said of them:

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Mat. 13:13-15).

They thought they knew all they needed to know about serving God, but when Jesus taught things that condemned their traditions, they rejected Jesus, not their faulty religion. Since they did not have an open heart and mind they missed out on the greatest gift of heaven.

Being open-minded was only part of what made the Bereans commendable. Coupled with their open-minded attitude, they had a love and respect for the authority of God. Their readiness of mind allowed them to listen attentively to Paul's teaching. Their love and respect for the authority of God made them search the Scriptures to see whether Paul's teaching was consistent with the Word of God. Without this love and respect for God's authority, open-mindedness becomes gullibility. However, God has safeguarded us against gullibility by revealing His Word to us. Paul said God gave His fully revealed, fully confirmed written Word "that we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14).

God does not want us to be helpless in determining the truth; so He gave us His word. We have a responsibility to compare whatever teaching we hear with the Bible. If that teaching contradicts the Bible, it is false. We must reject it no matter who believes it, no matter who teaches it. If that teaching agrees with the Bible, it is true. We must accept it no matter who believes it, no matter who teaches it. Doctrines are true not because of who believes and teaches them, but because they came from God. Our faith, confidence, and respect must be in God, not in the preacher. We must not automatically accept as true everything some faithful preacher or teacher says, just because he says it. In the same way, we must not automatically reject as false everything some unfaithful preacher or teacher says, just because he says it. Faithful brethren may be mistaken, or fall away from the faith, and false teachers do proclaim at least some truth. When we follow this principle, we will be less likely to be misled, confused, or deceived. We will accept doctrines because they come from God, not because a trusted brother taught it; and we reject doctrines because they did not come from God, not because a man known to teach false doctrine taught it.

THOSE WHO PROCLAIM THE WORD OF THE LORD MUST DO SO COMPLETELY AND WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Jeremiah conducted himself admirably in this situation. He could have told the king whatever he wanted to hear. Though the king granted Jeremiah's request to be removed from the dungeon (Jer. 37:21), Zedekiah could not control his princes, who later returned Jeremiah to prison upon learning of his prophecy (38:1-6). However, if Jeremiah had prophesied falsely, delivering a positive message regarding the king and the city, Zedekiah and the princes would surely have treated him more favorably. A lesser man might have given in to the temptation to alter the Lord's Word.

The Lord gave Jeremiah the responsibility of proclaiming the Lord's Word: "But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (1:7). The Lord put His words in Jeremiah's mouth and said, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (1:10). Over and over again, Jeremiah proclaimed that the Word of the Lord had come to him (Jer. 1:4, 11; 2:1; 7:1; 11:1; 13:3, 8; 14:1; 16:1; 18:1, 5; 21:1; 24:4; et al.). In every instance Jeremiah proclaimed God's message faithfully. Never did he try to alter it or withhold any portion of it.

God had been forthright with Jeremiah from the beginning; He did not try to deceive him into thinking his job as a prophet would be easy and without personal sacrifice. When God told Jeremiah that he was to "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant," the prophet knew that he was headed for a lifetime of difficult work. He must have known the people would be resistant to change, and indeed they were. God warned him of their opposition to his message, but gave him the comfort and confidence he needed to preach it anyway:

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight

against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I *am* with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee (1:17-19).

Later, the Lord repeated His promise of protection to Jeremiah:

And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I *am* with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible (15:20-21).

Though Jeremiah understood his responsibility and discharged that duty faithfully, he still suffered from the disappointment and discouragement that any human being would feel under the formidable circumstances he faced. Having been beaten and put in the stocks, Jeremiah expressed his limited understanding of what was happening to him. “O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me” (20:7). God had promised to deliver the prophet from those who opposed him, yet now Jeremiah found himself imprisoned and punished. Had God deceived him? No, Jeremiah simply could not yet see the Lord’s full plan for him. In his discouragement, Jeremiah decided to end his prophetic work: “Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name” (20:9). Even in his despair, Jeremiah understood the danger in seeking deliverance from his troubles by altering God’s Word. Instead, he simply chose to cease. However, his great respect for the Lord and his submission to the Lord’s authority soon won out over his despair. How could he remain silent when the people were running headlong into destruction? He had the message they needed to hear, whether they liked it or not, so he said, “But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*” (20:9).

Preachers and teachers today must be like Jeremiah. Paul told Timothy to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2), and that charge to gospel preachers remains intact today. Since it is the truth that makes men free (John 8:32), and since God’s Word is truth (John 17:17), then the only message of liberty is God’s Word. What then, is the point in preaching anything else?

Not everyone who hears God’s wonderful news of salvation will appreciate it as the blessing that it is. Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword”

(Mat. 10:34). That sword was the truth He proclaimed. It demands that its hearers make a decision about it, and their decisions bring about a separation between those who accept it and those who reject it. Sometimes those who reject it become antagonistic toward the one who preaches that message. In those kinds of situations the preacher must decide to remain true to the Lord, regardless of how his hearers' antagonism manifests itself. Some who reject the Lord's Word may walk away and refuse to listen, as they did to Jesus, when they "went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Some may ridicule the preacher, like the men of Athens did to Paul, calling him a "bab-bler" (Acts 17:18). Some may threaten the preacher, like the leaders of the Jews did to Peter and John (Acts 4:21). Others may turn to physical violence, like the Jews did to all of the apostles (Acts 5:40). None of these responses, or any other negative response, justifies changing the Lord's Word. Those who do make changes love themselves more than the Lord.

Blatant change is not the only way some preachers and teachers may respond to negative reception of the message; some respond by choosing not to preach certain parts of God's Word. Many people are perfectly content to hear preachers address issues that do not affect them. They have no quarrel with what the Bible says on those issues; so they support the preacher's efforts in these areas (or at least they do not oppose him). However, those same people may become agitated if the preacher addresses an issue that does affect their lives. They may get mad, they may leave, they may try to undermine the preacher's work, or they may cause problems in many other ways. What is the preacher or teacher supposed to do in these kinds of situations? Some preachers simply decide not to address those issues again. They preach the truth in what areas they do address, but they simply ignore those parts of the Word that offend certain members. This is no better than blatantly changing the Lord's Word. Paul understood that the things people need to hear most are the things they often do not want to hear. He told the Ephesian elders that he had "kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*" (Acts 20:20). He asked the Christians of Galatia: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16), when he perceived that they might not like the things he had written.

To decide to omit portions of God's Word is to make oneself a judge of His Word. Men who make such decisions might as well tell God that

they know more about what the people need to hear than He does. They care more for their own comfort than they do for the salvation of those who listen to them preach, and they love themselves more than they love the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah stood before king Zedekiah, having been brought out of the dungeon at the king's request, and heard the king say, "Is there *any* word from the LORD?" What thoughts might have gone through Jeremiah's mind? Under better circumstances, the prophet might have felt a glimmer of hope for the wicked king, wondering whether he had finally realized that the Lord's Word is the only reliable guide for life, but he knew the king too well to assume that. Knowing the king as he did, Jeremiah might have asked, "Why do you bother seeking the Lord's Word when you do not intend to submit to it?" He might have told the king to go back to the false prophets to see if they could undo the great trouble they had caused through their false words. If he had thought only of himself and his desperate circumstances, Jeremiah might have decided to alter the Lord's Word in some way, hoping to secure the king's favor toward him. However, the prophet did none of those things. When the king asked, "Is there *any* word from the LORD?" Jeremiah boldly proclaimed, "There is." He did not allow the prospect of being persecuted or even killed stop him from telling the king exactly what the Lord's Word was.

The church ought to learn these valuable lessons from Jeremiah's visit with the king. There is a Word from the Lord, and it is the only reliable guide to life for those who faithfully submit to what it says. To follow the words of false teachers is to follow the way of destruction. Because of these things, all who teach and preach the Word of the Lord must do so without compromise or omission.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

“IS IT NOTHING TO YOU, ALL YE THAT PASS BY?”

LAMENTATIONS 1:12

Lester Kamp



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INTRODUCTION

This Twenty-eighth Annual Bellview Lectureship promises to be one that will challenge us to study God’s Word more and will enlighten us concerning some ideas which are key to a proper understanding of our responsibilities before Almighty God. The effectiveness of questions and answers can be clearly seen in our Lord’s use of this method of teaching during His earthly ministry. It is, therefore, our opportunity now to learn from considering the question posed by Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, found in Lamentations 1:12, “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*”

THE CONTEXT OF THIS QUESTION

Jeremiah was a prophet to Judah and to the nations. He had repeatedly warned the people of Judah concerning the consequences of their sins. They did not listen. The familiar warning of Jeremiah in

Jeremiah 6:16-17 and the response of the people well illustrate the failure of Judah to heed the warnings of the prophet:

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*. Also I set watchmen over you, *saying*, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

Jeremiah's pleadings had fallen on deaf ears and hardened hearts.

Now Jerusalem was in ruins—ransacked and burned. The capital city of the people who belonged to God (“a peculiar treasure... above all people”—Exo. 19:5) had now lost its glory and prominence. The *holy nation* of God was now desolate and full of shame and disgrace. Judah was to be an example to the nations round about, but now sin had brought her down. Judah was to be a light to the world, but now Jerusalem was dark and deserted. They had been the *apple* of God's eye (Lam. 2:18); now that apple had become rotten to the core because of sin. Jerusalem now was a portrait of corruption and decay. Judah had been married to God—they were God's bride (Jer. 3:14). Because of their spiritual adultery, the great city of Jerusalem was now barren. From 1 Samuel 8 to Lamentations 1, the *holy nation* of Judah relentlessly pursued their desire to become like the nations round about them instead of being an example to them. Now they were just like those other nations—no longer peculiar, no longer a light, no longer in a special relationship and under the special blessings of Almighty God. All of this had occurred because of sin. Surely we have before us in Lamentations a divine explanation for the fall of Jerusalem. Sin is the reason! Sin always has its consequences (Rom. 6:23). Now, like the other nations Judah was subject to being overrun; in fact, they now had been destroyed. Judgment comes with certainty upon those who rebel against God and do not obey Him. **God does not dwell with sinful people.**

Jerusalem (Judah) had not become great because of numbers or military strength. Alliances with other nations (Egypt) could not prevent their ruin. An alliance with God was all that really mattered. The glory of Jerusalem had been because of its relationship with God (Pro. 14:34) and because of His presence. The destruction of Jerusalem revealed to Judah and to the nations what God's attitude is toward sin. Sin not repented of always has the same result. “This once-proud city was utterly destroyed and stripped of all its treasures and, without walls

for protection, was left in complete ruin" (Hester 245). "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed... for the LORD hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity before the enemy" (Lam. 1:8, 5).

Now, the weeping Jeremiah mourns over Jerusalem.¹

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger... For these *things* I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed (Lam. 1:12, 16).

As tears flow down his cheeks, he asks, "*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" It was with great sadness that the prophet observed the ruin of the great city of Jerusalem, and the lack of a proper appreciation by the passers by for what had occurred caused him to weep. Jeremiah's heart was broken as he saw the devastation of God's people. He wondered:

How doth the city sit solitary, *that was* full of people! *how* is she become as a widow! she *that was* great among the nations, *and* princess among the provinces, *how* is she become tributary! (1:1).

He knew that it was because of sin. That reality is what provoked his tears. "Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper" (1:5).

Johnny Ramsey accurately observed:

Rather than basking in the comfort of "I told you so," Jeremiah is genuinely broken and contrite in spirit over the devastation of his beloved city. Jerusalem is in shambles, and the prophet is in tears. It gave him no pleasure to realize that Judah's sins had produced such a calamity. He only regretted that their hardness of heart had made captivity a reality. If ever a scene brought vividly to mind the caustic wages of sin, it was the burning destruction of a once glorious Jerusalem (115).

JUDAH (JERUSALEM) AND THE CHURCH

Today the church which was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28) is the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). The church is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2) and is to remain pure (Eph. 5:27). Those who are members of that New Testament church uniquely belong to God—they are a "peculiar people," "a people for his own possession" (ASV) (Tit. 2:14). These same people are described by Peter as "an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

This holy nation, the church, is to be a light to the whole world! Paul wrote:

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).

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Phi. 2:15).

The church is the dwelling place of God. Paul's description of the church is clear:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

Note very carefully here that the church can be defiled, that God cannot dwell in such a church, and that the defiled church brings upon itself destruction. **God does not dwell with sinful people!**

The church of Christ is repeatedly warned in the New Testament against departures from the Truth and about false teachers. We will note here just a few:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Mat. 7:15).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their*

unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Pet. 2:1-9).

Paul warned the Ephesian elders:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

The New Testament also indicates that some were already departing from the Truth and the result of so doing.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but **there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ**. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be **accursed**. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be **accursed** (Gal. 1:6-9).

Refusal to accept and obey the Truth always results in condemnation and destruction. Paul wrote regarding false teachers, "*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).

Just prior to giving this warning to the Philippians, Paul describes himself as *weeping* (3:18). He was neither arrogant nor rejoicing in the destruction of others; he wept. He truly loved the souls of the lost, even those of his own countrymen: "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:2-3). The realization of any being lost brought him no pleasure. When he wrote the Corinthians about the sin within the congregation there, he wept because he knew the danger of sin and its destructive end. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4). He knew his responsibility to warn the brethren regarding the sinfulness of sin, but it broke his heart to see others lost and subject to the wrath of God.

His love for the souls of other men kept him from silence. This was his life's work. Paul genuinely cared about the spiritual well-being of

all the congregations of God's people. "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). Indeed, we can see the tears on our Lord's face as he looked over sinful Jerusalem in His closing days in the flesh and said:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Mat. 23:37-38).

Their potential glory in Heaven from which they persistently turned away in sin was something important to Him. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Christians today are to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3). We are with one mind to strive "together for the faith of the gospel" (Phi. 1:27). Yet, there is to be sorrow in our hearts as we observe the destruction to the church by those who promote false doctrines which lead people away from God.

"IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?"

"*Is it* nothing to you" when you see the church in ruins in many places because of **false teachers**. False teachers are destroying the Lord's people with their damnable doctrines, doctrines which are contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Clear warnings are found in the New Testament concerning how these false teachers are to be treated. Paul told the Romans: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). To the Ephesians it was written, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). The apostle John added:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The clear admonitions relative to false teachers are: "mark them," "avoid them," "have no fellowship with," "receive him not," "neither bid him God speed." Why? Because the church of Christ is precious, and these false teachers and their damnable doctrines destroy the church

for which Jesus shed His precious blood. God’s concern was and is the salvation of man. His warnings are because of that holy concern.

In spite of the warnings, there are some elders who extend invitations to these wolves in sheep’s clothing for them to come and speak to the flock of sheep that they are charged to protect. They will invite a *dynamic* wolf to come and speak to the little lambs (e.g., youth rallies, etc.), or encourage those little lambs to go to a nearby congregation to hear *popular* wolf who is at another congregation. Some elders have no problem inviting an *eloquent*, well-known false teacher for a Gospel Meeting while assuring everyone that they will make sure that he does not teach error while he is there.

This writer was invited to speak on a lectureship he believed to be sound. A few weeks prior to the lectureship he found out that a few of the scheduled speakers had participated in the now defunct Nashville Jubilee. This author then approached the lectureship director about this. He then went to the congregation’s elders and informed them. The response was that it was too late to “un-invite” these speakers; so they would be allowed to come. The elders then assured everyone that the lectures false teachers (*wolves*) would be carefully monitored, and, if error was taught, then it would be exposed publically. Did they realize the harm that could be done by endorsing these men and giving them a platform from which to advance their false doctrines though these may not have been specifically expressed while presenting their lecture? Was the value of the eternal souls of men nothing to them? Was the spiritual well-being of the local congregation and those who were visiting because of the lectureship nothing to them? Was the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son nothing to them? Were all the biblical warnings given above nothing to these elders? As brother Ira Rice often said, “You just cannot warn some people!” Some people just will not listen! Do you not mourn to see this taking place in the blood bought body of Christ? “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*”

Seemingly a growing number of brethren see nothing wrong with **fellowshipping the denominations**. They participate in joint worship services with them. They join the denominations in observing man-made religious holidays and ceremonies. There is no problem for them to sing with the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music; no problem for them to address the leaders of denominational churches as “Father,” “Pastor,” or “Reverend”; no problem in participating with their denominational friends in works of benevolence. Do they not

realize that one is either working for the Lord or one is an enemy of the Lord and a servant of Satan (see Mat. 12:30)? Do they not know that there is only one church that belongs to Jesus (Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23) and that there is only one church in which salvation can be found (Eph. 5:23)? Do they not realize that all other churches are man-made? Do they not care about the clear teachings of Scripture concerning the uniqueness of the church of Christ? Do they not realize that denominationalism is clearly condemned in the New Testament (1 Cor. 1:10)? Do they not know that the church that belongs to Jesus must wear His name (Acts 4:12; Rom. 16:16)? Do they not know that the use of religious titles is condemned by God (Psa. 111:9; Mat. 23:9)? Do they not know that when one speaks he should “*speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11)?

Do they not realize that fellowshiping denominations is spiritual adultery for the bride of Christ? When Jesus wrote the church at Thyatira in Revelation 2 regarding false teachers, He made this quite plain.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds (Rev. 2:20-22).

“*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*”

Some are destroying the church today by **accepting the authority of men** instead of accepting only those things that the Lord has authorized. Some implement such practices as the periodic “re-evaluation/re-affirmation” of elders. They no longer insist on having New Testament authority for those things which they practice. Some are allowing women to assume leadership roles in the work and worship of the church. They care not that the New Testament condemns such. Their primary concerns are in keeping people happy and in growing congregations numerically. They do not care what must be done to accomplish such results. They have come to believe that demanding Bible authority for our practices is a concept which is out of date and foolish. They have no problem observing the Lord’s Supper on days other than Sunday or in observing the Lord’s Supper in connection with weddings and/or funerals. They have made the Lord’s Supper a common meal of celebration and festivities even though the Corinthians

were condemned by Paul for doing the same thing (1 Cor. 11). They do not care what God has authorized. Instrumental music in worship is now viewed by some as being a *matter of opinion*. They believe that one can worship God acceptably using the instrument or without using it. Again, they do not care what God has said. "*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Many today in the church do not believe that purity of life is required of a Christian. They believe that a Christian can do anything he wants to do. This reminds us of the thinking of the people of Israel during the days of the judges. "Every man did *that which* was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 17:6; 21:25). There was no absolute, unchanging standard of conduct among them; there is no such standard among many today. Divorce for any reason and remarriage, dishonesty, abortion, homosexuality, greed, immodesty, lascivious behavior, corrupt speech, euthanasia, etc., are all acceptable to some within the church. Why? Because they do not think what God has said is important. What is important to them is doing whatever pleases them and whatever is necessary to keep them from feeling out of place and unaccepted by those in the world. Do they not realize that purity of life is part of true religion (Jam. 1:27)? Do they not know that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God (Jam. 4:4)? Do they not know that pleasing God must take precedent over pleasing men (Gal. 1:10)? Do they not know that a person can be in the world but not be of the world (John 17:15-16)? Do they not realize that God calls upon Christians to give their lives to Him and that means not being "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:1-2)? Do they not know that impure behavior by individual members of the church brings ruin and destruction to those who are members of the church (2 Cor. 3:2-3)? "*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

There are those who believe that sermons should not be negative. Many believe that the names of false teachers should never be mentioned publically. They believe that the church is better off without warnings, without condemnation of sins, without any indication of disapproval, without any suggestion of restraint, without talking about being lost, without any clear definition of right and wrong, etc. These people believe that those who engage in these practices are too harsh, too unloving, too old-fashioned, too narrow-minded, and too unforgiving. They characterize those who expose false teachers and false doctrines as being happy only when negative and condemning. They

suggest that contenders for the faith are just looking for a fight. They indicate that such individuals are always looking for faults to wage war and stir up trouble.

To these this scribe would say: “*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Is it nothing to you for the church to be destroyed? Is it nothing to you that the church is becoming just like the denominations round about? Is it nothing to you that those who are supposed to be the people of God are living the way of the world? Is it nothing to you that God’s people today are rejecting His Word? Is it nothing to you that souls are being lost which could be saved by the power of the Gospel? Is it nothing to you to obey God? Is the Truth nothing to you? Is it nothing to you to know that disobedience leads to ruin and destruction? “*Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”

All of these things are not *nothing*: they are imperatives! It should break our hearts and cause tears to flow down our cheeks to see the church apostatize, souls to be lost, the Word of God not heeded. We must wage the war against every false way, and do all that we can to keep the church pure by being true to God’s Word. It is not a pleasant task, but it must be done!

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

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ENDNOTE

¹*Halley’s Bible Handbook* includes this interesting speculation: “‘Jeremiah’s Grotto’ [i]s the name of the place, just outside the north wall of Jerusalem, where tradition says, Jeremiah wept bitter tears and composed this sorrowful elegy. This grotto is under the knoll that is now called ‘Golgotha,’ the self-same hill on which the cross of Jesus stood. Thus the suffering prophet wept where later the suffering Savior died.” (Halley, Henry H. *Halley’s Bible Handbook*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965. p. 320).

“FOR WHY WILL YE DIE?”

EZEKIEL 33:11

Jesse Whitlock



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INTRODUCTION

Ezekiel in the Hebrew means: “God will strengthen.” Ezekiel is one of the four major prophets in the Old Testament. Daniel was contemporary with Ezekiel, and both were taken into Babylonian captivity. Daniel was in the first deportation of Jews in 605 B.C. Ezekiel and about 10,000 others, including King Jehoiachin, were carried away in 597 B.C. (2 Kin. 24:14-16; Eze. 33:21). The third and the fourth deportations occurred in 586 and 582 B.C. respectively. Daniel was God’s prophet for the Babylonian and Persian courts. Ezekiel was God’s spokesman to the Hebrew exiles (2 Kin. 25:1-2; Jer. 39:1; 52:4; Eze. 24).

Ezekiel is referred to as “the son of man” approximately one hundred times within the book bearing his name. This is noteworthy since the New Testament refers to Christ Jesus as “Son of man” eighty-eight times. “The word of the LORD came” (Eze. 33:1, 23) is found some fifty times in the book. Recall the words of 2 Peter 1:21: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost [Spirit].”

In Ezekiel 33, God admonished Ezekiel concerning his duty as a watchman to the house of Israel. God had done so earlier in Ezekiel 3:17-21. What a lesson for preachers, elders, teachers, and Christians

today. If we fail to sound forth the warning that disobedience to God will cause one to be lost, then not only will our own soul be lost, but also the souls of those we have failed to warn (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:9; Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 10:13-17). We can deliver our own souls by faithfully proclaiming the Word of God boldly (2 Tim. 2:1-4; Mat. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; Acts 20:27). Let us warn of the possibility of apostasy (1 Tim. 1:19; 4:1; 5:8; 6:21; Luke 22:32; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 3:12).

Ezekiel's exiles have ignored his warning of listening to the lying prophets. "They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made *others* to hope that they would confirm the word" (Eze. 13:6). The exiles were forced to face the fact that they were responsible for individual iniquity. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Eze. 18:4; 18:20). However, "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Eze. 18:21). The Lord God takes no delight in His children dying in their iniquities and sins. "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye" (Eze. 18:32). God desires our deliverance from devious disobedience. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). "*If* the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Eze. 33:15).

Listen to the despairing cry of those descended into the depths of despair in disobedience to God: "If our transgressions and our sins *be* upon us, and we pine [waste] away in them, how should we then live?" (Eze. 33:10)? God has never delighted over the wicked who die in sin. His inspired and infallible instruction is simple:

Say unto them, *As I live*, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Eze. 33:11)?

This is the question that commands our attention today and every day: **"For Why Will Ye Die?"** Just as the Jews of old had repeatedly rebelled against the Redeemer, so many today reject and resist our Redeemer now. Remember the duty of the "watchman!"

THE FIRST BIRTH AND THE FIRST DEATH

Ecclesiastes 3 begins: “To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die” (3:1-2). The first birth takes place when man is born into this world by earthly parents. Every man living on earth today came into the world by means of physical birth. Man has no choice, no say in the matter.

Babes that are killed in the mother’s womb, babes that are still-born, little children, and all born mentally disabled will enter their first death at the point of demise. This would have reference to physical death. These all die, not saved, but *safe* in the arms of Jesus. They have no sin in their young and tender lives (Mat. 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

However, the majority of mankind will reach what we often call the “age of accountability.” It is the time or age in which we are able to discern right from wrong. We then enter the first death. Paul speaks of this subject: “And you *hath he quickened* [made alive], who were **dead** in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). If we live long enough on this earth, we will all take part in this first death. “For the wages of sin *is death*; but the gift of God *is eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Death is a prevalent topic in the Bible and in daily conversations in life.

Paul penned in Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death [physical death] by sin; and so death [spiritual death; i.e., separation from God] passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Genesis 3 tells us of the entrance of sin into the world. It has not departed for a single solitary second since! Sin is here to stay and separate between you and God (Isa. 59:1-2). Remember that sin will keep you from God, or God can keep you from sin, the choice is yours. Every accountable person on earth will give account for his own sin, not any supposed inherited sin from parents, grandparents, or Adam and Eve.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (Eze. 18:20).

This one passage deals a death-blow to cold, cruel, and calloused Calvinism. The false teaching of Adamic sin, inherited or original sin, etc., is not taught on one page of God’s Word! I once heard brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr., observe that if he were a mother with babe in

arms, listening to Calvinistic doctrine that babes who died were predestined to eternal life or **eternal death**, with no choice in the matter that he/she would take up that baby and walk out of the church building to never return. Amen and amen!

Adam and Eve died spiritually the moment they disobeyed God (Isa. 59:1-2). However, they both lived physically for many days after their initial disobedience. Just so, the majority of men in this time are walking dead men; i.e., spiritually dead, outside of the body of Christ, which is His church (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24; Acts 20:28).

THE SECOND BIRTH AND THE SECOND DEATH

Whenever a person dead in sin obeys the Gospel of Christ through faith (John 8:24; i.e., dies to sin—JW; Heb. 11:6), repents of sin (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9), confesses Christ as Lord (Mat. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10), is baptized into His name (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and lives faithfully (Rev. 2:10), that one becomes dead to sin. The Lord adds that person to His church (Acts 2:47). When one participates in this “second birth,” he is involved in that which was discussed by Jesus and Nicodemus: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). When one of his own volition obeys God and submits to baptism “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), he has submitted to his second death; i.e., death **to** sin. “God forbid. How shall we, that are **dead to** sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2). “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6). It is no accident that Paul then writes, “For he that is **dead** [dies to sin, repents, and obeys God] is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:7). Paul is speaking of the consequences of sin, which is eternal death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Please note that man has a free moral choice in regards to the second birth and the second death.

There are atheists, agnostics, infidels, and such like that choose not to believe and obey the Scripture. But, remember this: there are no dead atheists, only living ones (Heb. 9:27).

Also, there are religious people by the hundreds of millions who believe in Christ. They do not lie, curse, steal, cheat on their mates, drink, or gamble. They have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior—yet, are still **lost**! How can that be? They have never fully obeyed God’s plan of salvation. Christ taught: “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). Sometimes we hear the concern: "How could God allow this?" We are asking the wrong question. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing [wishing] that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). We ought to rather ask: "How could these not study and obey God?" (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Let us sound forth this warning once more. It is possible for a child of God, one who has fully obeyed the Gospel of Christ, to so sin as to be lost in eternity. The New Testament is replete with examples of those who fell from their first love—i.e., Judas (Mat. 26:14-16), Simon (Acts 8:9-24), Galatians (Gal. 5:4-7), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). The Bible is filled with almost two thousand warnings about falling away—i.e., Matthew 13:41, 1 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 4:4-10, Hebrews 3:13, and 2 Peter 2:20-22, to mention just a few. Why are these warnings contained in God's Word if the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy has one grain of truth within it?

Just about every one of us knows of some brother or sister in Christ who is no longer faithful to God. Someone said something or did something and "hurt their feelings." Therefore, to get revenge they "quit the church." They turn their back upon their Lord and Savior because some little "something" got under their skin. That is like being mad at the cat and kicking the dog. Most brethren know of a preacher who once faithfully fought "the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12), but now speaks smooth sectarian sermonettes to Christianettes to tickle their "itching ears" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Is it for fame, money, or popularity? This author knows not. He does know that many preachers and elders, in name, are actually "Captain D" elders and preachers. This writer did not know about this chain until he moved to Texas. But the menu board lists a "boneless chicken." Boneless is lacking in backbone; and chicken is equal to cowardice. Question: Do you know a "Captain D" elder or preacher? Of course, we all do.

Some will ask if this scribe is so narrow-minded as to think that only members of the Lord's church are going to be saved. I reply, "I am much more narrow-minded than that, I do not believe that all my brethren are going to be saved." Again, all of us know some members who attend services Sunday morning only, never attend a Bible class,

have never taught anyone what to do to be saved, and would never go to a wayward brother/sister—because they are wayward! James 4:17 still says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.” Brethren, sin, not repented of, will keep you out of heaven! The church of my Lord needs a revival to get heaven’s message to the lost in and out of the church!

THE THIRD BIRTH AND THE THIRD DEATH

As in the first birth, man has no real choice in this death or birth. The Lord affirms, “And as it is appointed unto men once to **die**, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Physical death is an appointment to be kept by all. The judgment is an appointment to be kept by all. It is written, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam. 2:26). All men die physically when the spirit departs the human body. The body returns to the dust (Gen. 3:19), and the spirit returns to God Who gave it (Ecc. 12:7).

Following this death there will be another birth in the figure of the resurrection of the dead. Again, every man who has ever lived on earth will take part in this resurrection. Paul refers to Christ in Colossians 1:18 as the “**firstborn from the dead.**” Christ taught:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall **come forth**; they that have done good, unto the **resurrection** of life; and they that have done evil, unto the **resurrection** of damnation (John 5:28-29).

What do these words of Christ do to the devious doctrine of the one thousand year reign of Christ? It is completely destroyed. The late brother Marshall Keeble gave a definition of “premillennialism.” He explained: “*Pre* means before, *millennial* means a thousand years, and *ism* means it just isn’t so!” The premillennial proponents want to separate the resurrection of the righteous dead and the wicked dead by one thousand literal years. “Hour” (Greek is *hora*) forbids this man-made doctrine from having any credence whatsoever. Jesus said in essence of this denominational doctrine, “this shall not pass, no, not for an **hour!**”

Paul penned:

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:3-4).

Our hope of salvation is rooted in Christ and His resurrection. Paul points to prophets of old predicting the humanity and divinity of the "Son of man." Christ is of the seed of David (Mat. 1; Luke 3). Both David and Jesus were born in Bethlehem and were of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:9-10). However, Christ was also God in the flesh. He is the Messiah of the world, God's only begotten Son (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). He was/is the Word (John 1:1-3). It is noteworthy that the NIV (Non Inspired Version) mis-translators were not consistent with their error in regard to the Greek *sarx*. An accurate rendering of *sarx* is "flesh." However, in Romans 7:5, 18, 25; 8:2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13; 13:14, and in at least five other books of the New Testament the NIV mis-translators forgot what they had done with that word in Romans 1 and leaned toward their goal of creating a Calvinistic commentary by rendering *sarx* as "sinful nature." There is a Greek word for "sinful" and "nature," but it is **not** *sarx*! Ah, consistency, thou art a jewel. Romans 1:4 affirms that Jesus Christ was declared to be the Son of the living God by His resurrection from the dead (cf., 1 Cor. 15:1-4). The undeniable evidence of the deity of Christ goes to His resurrection.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Mat. 16:21; cf., John 10:17-18).

THE FOURTH DEATH

We have noted that it is possible for one to be born as many as three times. Now, please note that it is possible to die as many as four times. Those consigned to the outer darkness and flames of hell will be in the "second death," which in certain instances could be the fourth or fifth death! Now follow this carefully: (1) We die **in** sin, (2) Some die **to** sin, (3) All die a physical death, (4) The unprepared die in the "second death." John wrote of this truth, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11). Again, "Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power" (Rev. 20:6). Further, "And death and hell [hades—ASV] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15). Finally, "all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). To be consigned to *gehenna* is the "second death." Someone objects that they can see how this could be the fourth death in certain

instances, but this could not be a fifth death. Now follow this carefully: (1) We die **in** sin, (2) We die **to** sin, (3) Some return and die **in** sin again (2 Pet. 2:20-22), (4) All die physically, (5) Those not right with God die in the “second death” (which conceivably could be number five, or several numbers beyond).

A good friend of this preacher, brother Samuel Evans, wrote a tract a number of years ago titled: “Are There Children of God In All Churches?” While flipping through his tract, this writer was surprised to notice on page eleven in bold print the statement: “Yes ~ one may find children of God in many of the churches.” Feeling certain that was not his belief, this author sat down and read his many Scripture references of how one becomes a Christian (1-6). Then he gave sufficient proof of how being in Christ is to be in His church and we are now “children of God” (7-9). He then devoted page ten to showing how “children of God” **may** depart from the faith and *join* some religious group of men; therefore, one **may** find children of God in various man-made churches. This scribe met such an individual in the Presbyterian church in Granbury, Texas, and is certain there are numerous “children of God” who have departed the faith and have entered the sectarian sanctuaries to be saturated with sermonettes, served with salad, soup, and sandwiches!

So it is possible to be born three times and to die four or more times. Would God that we ever so live that we need never die that final time in the flames of an eternal hell, which is identified in the Scripture simply as the “second death.” Christ sounded forth this clear warning:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13-14).

What Christ taught clearly and concisely in this context is that more people are going to be lost in eternity than are going to be saved in eternity. Many people in the religious world today are convinced that everyone will eventually be saved. Have you noticed that most denominational preachers never “lose a case” when it comes to a funeral service? They must fancy themselves as involved in the “Perry Mason Ministry.” The person who has died may have been a drunk, a cheat, a liar, a thief, an embezzler, and never repented of any of his evil doings. But, mark it down, the “Mason Minister” will have him ushered into eternal bliss in less than ten minutes after the message commences. You

know that is the truth! However, Christ will reverse the “Mason Ministry” verdicts with His voice of validity (John 5:22; 12:48; Acts 17:30-31; Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 20:12-15).

God asked, “For why will ye die” (Eze. 33:11)? Please take note that in Matthew 7:13-14 Christ makes it certain, clear, and concise that there is no middle of the road. Every person living on earth, having reached the age of accountability, will be found in one way or the other when we come to the end of life. There are no alternatives!

1. There is no Middle Messiah. All will respond either to the invitation of Christ (Mat. 11:28-30) or of Satan (1 Pet. 5:8).
“For why will ye die?”
2. There is no Middle Message. Everyone will respond either to the Truth (John 8:32; 17:17) or to false doctrines of false teachers (Mat. 7:15; Acts 20:28-31; Gal. 1:6-9; Eph. 4:14; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). **“For why will ye die?”**
3. There is no Middle Means. All mankind will enter by either the “narrow gate” (Mat. 7:13) or the “wide gate” (Mat. 7:13).
“For why will ye die?”
4. There is no Middle Manner. All must choose to walk either in the “light” (1 John 1:7) or in the “darkness” (Gal. 5:19-21).
“For why will ye die?”
5. There is no Middle Mansion. Everyone will be consigned to either marvelous mansions in heaven (John 14:1-3) or to misery in hell (Mat. 5:12; 10:28; 25:30; Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8).
“For why will ye die?”

What does the teaching of Christ in Matthew 7:13-14 do to the Romish superstition of *purgatory*? That man-made doctrine is devastated and destroyed by the powerful pronouncement of Jesus Christ. Since the Lord taught so plainly there are only two ways, two destinies, two gates, then for anyone to attempt to add still another, there would be three. For any to advocate the false doctrine of purgatory, he must be prepared to say that Christ lied in Matthew 7. The Scripture affirms that Christ lived a sinless life (Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27).

CONCLUSION

The prophet Ezekiel had a mission to perform that was not easy. As a prophet, he had a message that was pointed and plain. Ezekiel preached concerning: (1) the sinfulness of Judah, (2) the certainty of

judgment, (3) that judgment would be severe, (4) the Lord God's majesty, and (5) the promise of restoration. His purpose as God's prophet was to announce the will of God whether anyone listened or not. Ministers of the Gospel need to imitate Ezekiel today (1) in condemning self-righteousness, (2) encouraging the afflicted, (3) standing for God's principles even when it is not popular, and (4) teach the Truth even when the Truth is rejected. We need Ezekiels! The apostle Paul queried: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). We must ask this question and others that are not popular today. **"For Why Will Ye Die?"**

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

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“SHOULD NOT THE SHEPHERDS FEED THE FLOCKS?”

EZEKIEL 34:2

Eddie Whitten



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INTRODUCTION

A person should desire to have the answer to all the questions the Bible poses. Anyone who could know all the answers to all the questions just of the Old Testament would be so fortunate. However, just to know the answers to some of the questions of the Old Testament would be such a help toward a better and deeper knowledge of the nature and mind of God. The more we learn the better equipped we are to understand and appreciate the power, purpose, compassion, and love God demonstrates in our relationship with Him.

This lecture book will be a formidable collection of Bible answers to Bible questions. It is well worth the money to acquire the book and well worth the effort to study it. It is also well worth the time and energy to try to get others to read it, use it, and benefit by it. Our appreciation goes out to those who have made it available to the brotherhood.

THE BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe *be* to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: *but* ye feed not the flock (Eze. 34:1-3).

Dickson states that the prophet Ezekiel was among “many captives taken to Babylon in the second stage of the Captivity in the reign of Jehoiachin in 597 B. C.” (931). The prophet Daniel was taken to Babylon in the first attack of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, against Jerusalem in 606 B.C. Ezekiel was called to prophecy in the fifth year of his captivity which would place his prophesy at about 592 B.C. He states that he was among the captives by the river of Chebar (Eze. 1:1).

We should understand the conditions and circumstances under which those who penned the Bible wrote so we can have a better grasp of the mental stresses and influences the people were experiencing. This is especially true of the time of the Babylonian captivity. One of the little realized factors that made Ezekiel’s prophecies so important is the fickle nature of man. There were hundreds of thousands, or more, of the Jews who were taken to Babylon from 606 B.C. until 586 B.C., when Jerusalem was razed to the ground. Of these vast numbers, only a relative few, about fifty thousand, chose to return to their native land when all the Jews were released by Cyrus, king of Persia, in 536 B.C. The very people of God had become so enamored by the Babylonian, and later the Persian, lifestyle that they chose to turn their backs upon God and embrace the pagan life. The cause of such defection and lack of loyalty to their God can be attributed only to a lack of teaching and edification. An example of this same kind of tragedy was reflected by the Israelites immediately following the death of Joshua. Only one generation of the descendants of the children of Israel who were led out of Egyptian bondage by Moses was sufficient to fall away from God. Judges 2:10 states, “And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.” The sad fact about that deplorable condition was that the parents of the generation that arose “who knew not God” did not teach their children!

Ezekiel writes to try to encourage those captives to remain faithful to God. The people are in a foreign land and in a foreign culture. They

are far removed from their beloved temple and from their way of life. The absence of that which we love often tends to dull the fervor of the lover. That was what was happening in Babylon! The absence of the worship of God was having a detrimental effect on the worshipers. One of the characteristics of Ezekiel was the uniqueness of his illustrations. Later, in chapter 37 of this wonderful book, Ezekiel prophesies concerning the valley of dry bones. The imagery of this vision is captivating. One can picture in his mind such a scene—and wonder. Ezekiel uses (of course through inspiration) this imagery to describe the pitiful plight of the nation of Israel, composed of both the former kingdoms of Judah and Israel. They will be reunited into the one kingdom of Israel and be restored to their land. It would be that kingdom through which the Messiah would come into the world.

The people of God who were in Babylonian bondage desperately needed a voice of authority—a voice to rally them back into a proper relation with God. There have always been leaders in every phase of life. In whatever setting one may address, there must be one or more to function as a leader or leaders. People left without such leadership are many times in the Scriptures referred to as sheep. Such is the case here on the banks of the river at Chebar, in Babylon.

THE CURRENT PROBLEM

Ezekiel deals with many problems and principles in the foregoing chapters of his prophesy. We are primarily interested in the leadership, or lack thereof, which he addresses in chapter 34. Those who harp against “negative preaching” need to take a page from the writing of Ezekiel in this instance. He begins by establishing the authority by which he speaks. He says, “the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel” (34:1). God tells Ezekiel that something is wrong that needs fixing. He knows what is wrong. He also knows who is responsible for the problem. God tells Ezekiel to **preach against** (those two terrible words!) the shepherds who are at fault. The shepherds, in this case, are those who are in authority and whose charge it is to see to the spiritual welfare of the people. The sorry picture that is unfolding before us is the horrible conduct of the rulers. The language of Ezekiel indicts these rulers and especially the kings of Israel who were responsible for the plight of God’s people.

In the language of the Old Testament...the shepherds of the people are always its kings and other civil rulers, and those whom Ezekiel had in his thoughts were the tyrannous rulers of the house of David, like Jehoiakim and Zedekiah and their satellites (Plumptre and Whitelaw 206).

A study of Old Testament history would be most helpful, at this point, to help the reader grasp the real and heartbreaking tragedy Ezekiel is lamenting in this chapter.

Herbert Lockyer writes:

Turning to the faithless shepherds of Israel, Ezekiel has some soul-searching words for them to hear. Whether our flock are children around us in the home or Sunday school, or adults in a meeting place, the shepherd must keep in mind that God will require the flock at his hand (verse 10). Under-shepherds may fail, but the shepherd Himself never will (verses 11-15). Place alongside of this chapter John 10, where the Lord Jesus is the shepherd who brings the sheep into good pasture. Sheep rest when they are satisfied and free from alarm. Christ provides His own with green pastures and still waters (189).

Henry Halley remarks:

Responsibility for the captivity of Israel is here laid directly at the door of the greedy and cruel kings and priests who had exploited and led astray the people. Against this background Ezekiel sees a vision of the Future Shepherd of God's People in the coming Messiah (15, 23, 24), under whom they shall never more suffer, and "there shall be showers of blessing" (26) (332).

The northern kingdom of Israel had long ago been conquered by Assyria, and the people had intermarried with the Assyrians. They would be referred to as the hated Samaritans by the time Jesus would come into the world. There was a remnant that remained faithful to God and was a part of those who were captives in Babylon with Ezekiel. The southern kingdom of Judah had survived for another 136 years following the conquest of Israel because of the good kings: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. They had also lapsed into unfaithfulness during the reigns of the kings following Josiah. They had been warned many times by God through the prophets, but had turned a deaf ear. Now they were suffering the consequences of their folly. Ezekiel is condemning the plight of the captives to the greediness and selfishness of those kings. The kings and other civil leaders are those to whom Ezekiel refers with his term, *shepherds*. They were the ones who had the responsibility of leadership, provision, and protection of their people; they had miserably failed in their responsibility. Instead of

leading the people to safety, they had sacrificed the welfare of the people for their own selfish gain and purpose.

The condition of the people is graphically described in various word pictures. Using the sheep to represent the people, he charges the shepherds with completely ignoring those who were *diseased*, i.e., the

weak sheep, and the sick, that were suffering from more definite maladies. So the broken are the sheep that have fallen from a rock and thus maimed themselves. Each case required its appropriate treatment, and none had met with it (Halley 332).

Some of the sheep had been *driven away*. Some had become *lost*, but the shepherds were not concerned. Their interest was only in themselves. Some were *scattered* and had become victims of the heathen in the days of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. "Of these the kings took no heed, and shut themselves up in the luxurious seclusion of their palace" (Halley 332). Ezekiel records the people's plight thusly: "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek *after them*" (34:6).

GOD'S RESPONSE

The Sovereignty of God again shines through as a strong beacon of light in a world of darkness. God assures the captives that the transgressions of the heathen, the avarice of the rulers, the inequity of the time, will all be overthrown by His might and power. The faithful Israelites shall be gathered again by the overruling hand of God, they shall be recovered from their captivity, they shall be restored to their land, they shall be comforted and provided for in rest, they shall be protected and cared for, and they shall have a new shepherd.

As for the flock, they shall also be judged. The people are no different than the rulers if they are of the same mind, i.e., avaricious, greedy, and overbearing. Any of the people who find it in their desire to trod down the weak and oppress the poor will find the same judgment as the guilty leaders. Punishment is the fate of those who defy and deny God.

God also promises there will be one Shepherd that will be over the restored people. This promise is prophetic. The Messiah that is to come will be the Christ of Nazareth. He will be the one who will bring about the covenant of peace (34:25). The captives to whom Ezekiel writes will be restored to their land, the land of Canaan, and there will be showers of blessings (34:26). This would be true both physically in

their land and spiritually in the church that Jesus would build in the future. Compare the conduct of the evil rulers, who caused the people to go into captivity, to that of the true Shepherd.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine (John 10:11-14).

Ezekiel's prophecy is two-fold. First, it is for the purpose of encouraging a flagging nation who was at the mercy of heathen rulers and people. They had been betrayed by their leaders and were suffering the consequences of following them into captivity. They must have some ray of hope that will sustain them for the long years of captivity that still lay ahead for them. The time was going to be sufficient for the majority of the people to acclimate themselves to the pagan way of life, and many would be lost spiritually forever. To those who would retain their belief in God, Ezekiel's prophecies would be the strength they needed to give them the courage and determination to persevere. They would have to understand that their conduct would have to meet the high ethical and moral standards of God especially in regard to their relationship with Him and with others. Deliverance from captivity was only part of God's promise to those who would remain faithful to Him. He also promises prosperity and plenty in their own land upon their return. The allotted time of the sentence for sin—seventy years in captivity—would have to be served. The time would then come that they would be delivered back to their own land. Verses 27 through 31 should have been ample assurance to the people to spur them to faithfulness.

Second, the shepherds, those who were in authority and who were responsible for the welfare of God's people, needed to be aware of God's displeasure, His anger, and His condemnation of their evil. Their greed and lust caused them to lose their place of authority in their land as well as their souls in eternity. This was a lesson that would put fear into the hearts of the shepherds and pronounce judgment upon all those who chose to follow those leaders. The history of God's people would have been vastly different if the people had been true to God all through the ages, and if the kings, and those in authority, would have remained in fearful and reverent submission to God. However, because of their

disobedience and rejection of God as their Sovereign, they would pay the consequences in full measure.

APPLICATION

Paul said that “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). There are applications that can and must be made of the example and illustration of the events out of which Ezekiel uttered his prophecies. The Law of Moses, which was the guide of the Jews in the time of Ezekiel, is not our law today. We do, however, learn the principles taught by the law. We also learn the consequences of submission or rejection of the people to that law. We learn about God’s reaction to the conduct of the people relating to that law, and the results of the approval or disapproval of God to their conduct. Since God’s nature does not change, we should gain great insight as to how God’s response to the Israelites in the time of Ezekiel applies in our time.

First, and foremost, is the desperate need to understand that God’s law for us, the law of Christ, “the perfect law of liberty” (Jam. 1:25), must be honored above all other sources of authority. Jesus said, “All power [authority—ASV] is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat. 28:18). There is no power higher than that of God. God, the Father, gave unto His Son, Jesus, all authority pertaining to human conduct as well as that of a spiritual nature. Jesus always acknowledged Jehovah God as His Father (John 17:4). The writer of Hebrews quotes Jesus, “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God” (10:7) and, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second” (10:9).

It is only right that we are subject to the laws of the land in which we live. We are under the authority of civil government (Rom. 13). Jesus acknowledged that we are to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mat. 22:21; Mark 12:17). A violation of civil law is also a violation of God’s law since God recognizes civil law as far as it is in agreement with His law. Two things militate against the civil law in regard to its relation with God’s law: (1) It cannot supersede God’s law (Mat. 6:33), and (2) men must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). That just means that man is to be subservient to the laws of the land as long as the laws of the land are in harmony with the law of God. If it is

not, then God's law is to take precedence over civil law in every instance.

We are also under the law (ordinances) of whatever corporate entity by which we may be employed. It sometimes happens that employers request their employees do something that is unethical or dishonest. Again, there are two things to be considered by the employee: (1) Does this request require something of me that is not in harmony with man's law? And (2) is this going to require an action that is not in line with God's law? If the answer to number one is not in the affirmative, then it is not required of the employee to do it. If the answer to number two is not in the affirmative, then it is not required of the employee to do it even if it is in harmony with number one! God's Word cannot be superseded by corporate industry.

Also, wives are not under the law (authority) of their husbands who might demand any action of them that is not in harmony with God's laws of morality or ethics (1 Cor. 7:15). No one is required to violate God's Word regardless of who might demand that it be done. School authorities sometimes require activities or conduct that is alien to the principles of Christianity. It has happened many times that parents have compromised Christian principles to allow their child/children to participate in certain school activities. Their defense is that they cannot prevent whatever the compromise demands because of Title IX or some other so-called reason. The alternative to that lame excuse is to forego their child's participation in that activity. In the long run, the child is going to benefit by his/her parent's wise decision and be glad they did not jeopardize their souls by catering to the authority of the school administration.

Now, we come to the real application of Ezekiel 34:2. Elders in the Lord's church do not have the authority to lead the congregation over which they have the oversight, the authority of leadership, into doctrinal error. Such action constitutes apostasy and is not condoned by God! Elders equate to the *shepherds* of Ezekiel's day. They are the designated authority of God to lead, feed, and protect His children (Acts 20:28). Their task is of the highest priority. As awesome as their responsibility might be, it is still beneath and subject to the Word of God. We are to obey them that have the rule over us (Heb. 13:17) in everything that is right and in harmony with God's Word. God's people are never required to follow after doctrinal error (2 Tim. 4:2-3) even if elders try to lead them that way.

Second, we must realize that, as long as we keep ourselves within the confines of God's wonderful grace, we will fare well both in this life and in the life to which we aspire in heaven. God has always, does now, and will always keep His word with regard to His promises to those who remain faithful to Him. The Jews of Ezekiel's day were well provided for in their new but spiritually fatal home. They lived comfortably as we learn from history. Their priorities gradually shifted from that which they knew to be their heritage to those of their new environment. The purpose of their captivity was lost in the opportunities of the pagan economy.

We are distant from the influence and experiences of those captives of so long ago both in time and locality. The influences that affected them, however, are present with us now and where we live. It is not a matter of when and where that is important to contemplate; it is still a matter of loyalty and dedication to the power that ruled then and that rules now.

God's Divine will was being communicated to His people then through His prophet, Ezekiel. God's Divine will is being communicated today to us through His Divine Word, the Bible.

LESSONS WE MUST LEARN

From the account recorded in Ezekiel 34, there are many lessons we can and must learn. The following are submitted for your consideration.

Elders and the Qualifications

We must know what the Bible teaches about the qualification of elders. One of the most devastating of all the ills that can befall a congregation is to appoint men to the eldership who are not qualified. The church of our Lord is suffering horribly and unnecessarily because of men who are unqualified occupying the exalted office of elder. It is without question that no person is sinless. Perfection in the sense of being without sin is impossible for men (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:7-10). Therefore, it stands to reason that a man who is being considered for appointment as an elder be one whose life is not characterized by sinful practices. Perhaps the qualification that is paramount and upon which all the other qualifications relating to character depend is Paul's statement that "a bishop then must be blameless" (1 Tim. 3:2). *Blameless* in this context merely means that the one being considered to serve as an elder must be one against whom a charge of misconduct cannot be sustained. A man can make a mistake, and he can commit sin.

However, if the life of that person is one in which such mistakes, or sins, is not a common practice, then a charge of his being of that character cannot be sustained.

It must be noted that, missing from the list of qualifications Paul gave, are some of the criteria by which many elders are chosen today. The church is plagued with men who are popular with the congregation and perhaps the community, but who know very little about the Word of God. Popularity is not listed among the qualifications Paul stipulated. A good personality stands one in good stead, to be sure, but being likeable is far from having the knowledge of the Scriptures one needs to properly and effectively lead God's people. Titus 1:9 tells us that elders are to hold fast the faithful Word that "that he may be able **by sound doctrine** both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

Another popular *qualification* by which elders are selected is one's business acumen. It would be, of course, good to have some good business sense in the role of leadership, but that is not one of the qualifications Paul gives. It is a hard thing for some to realize that the church is not to be led or conducted according to business practices. The church is a family—the family of God—and as such needs to be fed and nurtured as if it were the elders own family. The standard by which one leads in the eldership is not knowing how to run a business, but what does the Bible teach. Knowing all about a certain kind of business no more qualifies a person to oversee the church than knowing how to operate a locomotive qualifies him to fly an airplane. Being a good businessman does not in itself qualify one to serve as an elder.

Another misconception regarding the qualifications of an elder is that of how much money he might have. One elder had a habit of challenging the congregation to finance favorite projects he wished to achieve by offering to give to that project as much money as the congregation would give collectively; he had a lot of money. Riches might greatly assist the church according to one's liberality, but having money is not one of the qualifications Paul listed for one to be an elder.

Elders Feeding the Flock

Elders must feed the church the proper spiritual food. Elders have a standard by which they oversee and govern the church—it is the Bible. The Bible says that elders are to take heed to themselves. This is first and foremost in their service as an elder. If they cannot control themselves, they cannot be the right example for the members to

follow. Second, they are to take heed to the flock (the church). The welfare of the church is critical to an elder. The welfare of the church depends upon the spiritual food they are being fed. Paul instructed the elders: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The feeding of the flock consists of teaching the Word of God to the congregation in such manner that they can understand it and live by it. Just as a father sees that his family is fed the proper nutritional diet that is beneficial to their physical bodies, so the elders must feed the flock (congregation) the spiritual food that will make them spiritually strong. The *shepherds* of the people of Ezekiel's day had not seen to the education of the Jews by observing God's law for them. They found themselves captives in a foreign land.

Elders Protecting the Flock

Elders must be prepared to protect the flock. As a father protects his family, the elder must be aware of the evils and perils that threaten the spiritual welfare of God's family. There are so many influences that war against the church of our Lord that the elder's job is ever so critical. The spiritual strength and knowledge that an elder must have to protect the flock of God must come first from his personal relationship with God. He must be right with God in his prayer life. Strength has always come through prayer. Jesus prayed constantly for strength from God, His Father. So should we all, but especially the elders.

Second, elders must have knowledge of God's Word to protect the church from false doctrines, and they must use that knowledge to actively defeat those who would teach that which is false. Many elders are averse to pointing out dangers to the church. Their arguments are many, but mainly along the lines of: "Who are we to judge?" Or: "We are not perfect, either," or: "We should not be concerned about what others are doing unless it begins to affect this congregation." Such rationalization is against every teaching of the Bible. Jesus warned against false teachers: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). The apostle John warned against false teachers, also: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Paul said of some in the church in Corinth who were exalting themselves as

apostles, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). We have already alluded to Titus 1:9 as part of the qualifications an elder must have.

It is not only permissible to expose and defeat false doctrine, it is imperative that such be done, and it is the responsibility of the elders to see that it is done!

Respecting Elders

Good elders are to have the respect of the congregation. Rebellion is not in the vocabulary of the sheep. The congregation is often referred to as *sheep*, or *the flock*. Sheep do not rebel against the shepherd! It is true, and scripturally so, that the congregation is not to follow a shepherd into the furnace of fire of error or apostasy. Some believe today that if they decide they do not like a certain person, or persons, in the eldership, they are at liberty to vote him/them out. A certain percentage of approval is demanded for such to remain in the office of elder. That is foreign to every approach to Bible authority. The only stipulation for removing an elder is if an elder is guilty of sin and will not repent. Sin, in this case, is not whether the elder in question agrees with the other elders; it is whether he has violated the law of Christ, the Bible. The process is set forth in 1 Timothy 5:19-20: “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Congregations are being torn asunder and souls are going to be lost because of a relatively new practice of exercising re-evaluation and re-confirmation of elders on the basis of personal disagreements. Such conduct will lead the congregation into spiritual condemnation just as surely as the lack of proper leadership led the Jews into Babylonian captivity in the long ago!

Elders and Liberalism

Elders must not be led astray by liberal teachers. A heavy influence is being wielded against elders by: (1) change agents; (2) philosophies emanating from our so-called Christian universities through the cunning craftiness of liberal professors; (3) and a lack of personal study of the Scriptures. Glib and educated preachers overwhelm some elderships with their academia. Let it be known that a Ph.D. does not automatically make one an untouchable authority on the Bible. Intimidation is commonplace among our pulpit practices, and it is having a destructive effect in our elderships. Elders, not being academically equipped to contest the university-trained change agent are helpless to withstand the

onslaught. The truth is lost in that many times elders do not, or cannot, refute the gainsayer with sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9). Consequently, the preacher becomes the *pastor*, and the *pastors* become the sheep.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate responsibility for the loss of all of the churches of Christ which have gone into spiritual captivity, as did the people of Ezekiel's day, lies at the feet of elders who have used the office of elder to their own benefit and glory. They have fed themselves and have eaten the fat...they have clothed themselves with the wool and have killed them that are fed, but they did not feed the flock (Eze. 34:2-3). "Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"

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“IS THY GOD...ABLE TO DELIVER THEE?”

DANIEL 6:20

Riley Nelson



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INTRODUCTION

As is being set forth in this lecture series, the Old Testament is filled with great questions. The use of questions is an excellent tool of teaching. One does well in learning to use questions properly in teaching the Bible to others. Learning to use open-ended questions allows the student to ponder the answer and to make application to his own situation. It allows the teacher to learn the thoughts and feelings of his pupil. Closed-ended questions (those that can be answered yes or no) are also helpful, because they can be used to check the interest of the student and to gain commitment from the student.

When the New Testament is studied, it is soon realized that in the teachings of Jesus, He utilized questions, many times in His teachings. His listeners were made to think, not only about what He was saying, but also about how it affected their situation. The enemies of Jesus found themselves on the horns of a dilemma many times, by the questions the Lord asked them.

DANIEL IN NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S KINGDOM

The text for our lesson is found in Daniel 6. Even before one gets to chapter six of Daniel, the strong character and devotion to God by Daniel shines as a beacon. He was taken captive and transported from

his native Jerusalem to the evil city of Babylon; he was considered part of the spoils of war. Because of his faith and devotion to God, he was blessed by God and excelled in the Babylonian kingdom. His allegiance to God and his beliefs are set forth in Daniel 1. The king supplied provisions for his captives such as he believed would sustain them and even improve them. Daniel knew the things provided by the king were not things he, as a Jew, would be allowed to partake of and remain pleasing to God.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (1:8).

The prince of the eunuchs opposed Daniel and his friends not partaking of the appointed menu, fearing they would not look as good as those who ate the king's food. Daniel proposed a test: allow him and his friends eat pulse and drink water for a period of ten days, and then compare them to those who ate of the king's victuals. The eunuch with whom God had brought Daniel in favor agreed to the test. The results showed Daniel and his friends superior to the other captives. "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat" (1:15).

With God blessing him, Daniel continued to stand out in the Babylonian Empire. When Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream, which none of his magicians or astrologers could recount for him (Dan. 2), Daniel was able to interpret the dream, giving all credit for his ability to God. "Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said...there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (2:27-28). Years later when Belshazzar sat on the throne (Dan. 5), an occasion arose where an interpreter was needed by the king. While Belshazzar was hosting a drunken party at which the vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temple in Jerusalem were being used, suddenly the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the wall. This occurrence was so upsetting to Belshazzar that the Bible states his knees knocked together (5:3). None of the king's wise men could interpret the saying. The queen mother came into the hall having heard of the developments and told the king of a man who had helped Nebuchadnezzar with such a quandary.

This was not a wife of Belshazzar, because his wives and concubines had been engaged in the debauchery. She was queen mother, likely the widow of Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather. She would therefore have known of and remembered Daniel as one who could interpret visions and dreams (Cates 251).

Daniel came forth and told the king what the writing meant.

This *is* the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:26-28).

It should be noticed that Daniel not only told the interpretation, but he also told the king that by using the vessels, he had lifted himself up against God (5:23). The Scripture tells us that the interpretation came to pass. “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, *being* about threescore and two years old” (5:30-31).

DANIEL SERVES IN DARIUS’ GOVERNMENT

In the new government Daniel again was blessed by God and was appointed to the office of president. Of this office, the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states:

Probably a Persian derivative from *sar*, “head,” and the Aramaic equivalent for Hebrew *shoter*. The meaning is self-evident and refers to the appointment of Daniel by Darius to be one of the three princes who rule over the satraps of the empire (2438).

Daniel, with God continuing to bless him, excelled in his work. The king was contemplating placing him over all the other presidents. “Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit *was* in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (6:3). This favor in the king’s eyes did not set well with Daniel’s fellow cabinet men.

THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL

If Daniel was such a valued member of the king’s cabinet, why then was he to be found in a den of lions? Daniel was placed in a den of lions for breaking a decree set forth by king Darius. This decree was an evil tool set in place by the enemies of Daniel.

Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he *was* faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against

this Daniel, except we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God (Dan. 6:4-5).

It says much of the character of Daniel that the only way in which anything could be found against him was by entrapment concerning his devotion to God. The decree stated that for a period of thirty days no petition could be made of any God or men save by the king. Darius let his ego get the best of him and signed the decree into law. He was not thinking of any harm it might cause, just glory to himself. He was soon to regret signing this decree.

Daniel heard of the decree and fully understood its meaning. When the time for his daily prayers came, he went into his house and kneeled in prayer as was his usual custom. The Bible states:

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (6:10).

It is also seen that Daniel did not try to hide his praying to God, for the windows in his chamber remained open. Daniel was neither afraid nor ashamed to offer prayer to God, no matter what the government required. This is a lesson that all Christians need to remember, for it may not always be the case that worshiping and serving God are acceptable to government leaders.

Daniel's enemies were quick to report to the king of Daniel's transgression. Darius was not happy with the outcome of his ego trip, and it seems he even took the blame for the wrong that was to befall Daniel (6:14). He had a strong affection for Daniel, but try as he might, he could find no way to deliver Daniel from the punishment. In fact, those who brought the transgression to the king's attention were quick to point out the fact that the king's decree could not be changed.

Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians *is*, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed (6:15).

The importance of displaying to all men one's faith in God shows plainly in the words of Darius to Daniel just before having him thrown into the den of lions. “*Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee*” (6:16). What a wonderful statement of Daniel's devotion to Jehovah!

The king was not able to rest that night; he was so concerned about his friend Daniel that sleep evaded him. The Bible states that he arose early to find out if Daniel was safe. His question was truly a great one.

And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? (Dan. 6:20).

How relieved he was when Daniel told of how he had been delivered!

Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God (6:21-23).

What a surprise the enemies of Daniel must have had when Darius sentenced them to the fate they had planned for Daniel!

And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions, *them*, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den (6:24).

Because of Daniel's faith and devotion to God, he was delivered from the lions. After this event, Darius wrote of God's power to all in the land, stating:

I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he *is* the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion *shall be even* unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions (6:26-27).

DARIUS' QUESTION

Now let us look more closely to the question Darius asked of Daniel when he was delivered from the lions.

And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? (6:20).

Darius shows many things about himself and mankind in general. His question leads those who read Daniel to ask more questions. These

questions not only tell of the character of this Gentile ruler, but of the character and wonderment of mankind.

Darius' question, combined with his sleepless night, showed his fondness for the man Daniel. Try as he might, rest would not come to him. “Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him” (Dan. 6:18). Even the tone of his voice showed the compassion he felt; he was said to cry out with a *lamentable* voice. “And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel...is thy God...able to deliver thee from the lions?” (6:20). This word carries with it the idea of grief, sorrow, and agony. As the passage is read, one can almost hear the hopefulness in the voice of Darius—and the longing for an answer from his friend.

It is also seen in the question that the king knew whose servant Daniel was. He was the servant of the “living God.” Most rulers expect their subjects to serve only them, but Daniel's faith and determination had caused this ruler to realize this would never be the case with Daniel. Daniel's strong faith in God and his good character led Darius to know that Daniel served God first and the king second.

QUESTIONS RAISED BY DARIUS' QUESTION

If Darius truly believed in the power of Daniel's God, as he stated while having Daniel thrown into the lion's den, why does he even bother to ask his question? His question showed the frailty of human nature, which trusts only in what can be seen rather than having faith in the unseen. Darius wanted to believe, perhaps to soothe his own conscience, but he could not bring himself to fully trust in Daniel's God. It did not seem possible that Daniel could be delivered from the sure sentence of death in the jaws of the lions. His lack of faith in Daniel's God may have stemmed from experiences with his own gods. Perhaps on occasions, when lives had been in jeopardy, prayers and offerings to his gods had come to no avail.

It is true that he was not of the Jewish religion, so he lacked the benefit of Hebrew history and teachings concerning all God had done for His people. However, the life of Daniel was not one that had been lived in a closet. His rise to prominence in the kingdom of Babylon would have been known even in the new government. His devotion to God was readily seen by all, and he was a loyal and faithful member of Darius' cabinet.

It is the case today that some Christians think of their own salvation as Darius thought about Daniel's deliverance. They want to believe that their sins are forgiven by their obedience to God, but their faith is not strong enough to allow them to do so. Those who have this sense of no forgiveness find themselves in a fog of doubt. Satan enjoys this fog of doubt, hoping that it will grow. Without that trust in God's saving power, doubt may arise concerning other things about God. If there is no salvation for man, if Christians are not saved by the blood of the precious Son of God, why should one live in accord with God's Word? Satan used doubt to ensnare mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. With her skepticism of God's instruction being true, she succumbed to partaking of the forbidden fruit.

Those who have this weakness in their faith need to concentrate on shoring up the breach created by this weakness. They need to study more earnestly the Word of God, especially passages concerning understanding salvation. John wrote:

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

Further study would be needed concerning God's fulfilling His promises to man. Just as Darius showed the frailty of human understanding in believing Daniel might not be saved, some doubt God's ability to fulfill His promises to man today. Of this Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Numerous examples are shown in the Old Testament of God doing exactly what He promised. These should serve to develop and bolster a stronger faith (Rom. 10:16). Peter wrote: "But grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

There is a need for those with a weak faith to become more active in the work of the church. More involvement in things of a religious nature leaves less time for worldliness to creep into one's life. James wrote of how faith and works go hand in hand. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (Jam. 2:18). Jesus spoke of several opportunities of service in Matthew 25. He spoke of those in

need of food and drink, shelter and clothes, those who needed comfort. Those who busy themselves in such works will find their faith becoming stronger as they become true servants for God. Paul wrote concerning working for the Lord. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Those with a weak faith need to come to know that the God of heaven **is** able to deliver them from the "den of lions" called sin. Christ understands temptations, having been tempted while upon the earth. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). God is aware when man is tempted and provides a way of escape.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it* (1 Cor. 10:13).

Faith in God means giving up the idea that man can take care of everything without help from any being. Faith in God means trusting in Him even when things are difficult to understand. The words of Solomon penned in the long ago are still relevant today. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Pro. 3:5-6).

Those with seeds of doubt in their faith need to come to an understanding of the great love God has for them as well as His desire that they be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Perhaps one of the most illustrative passages of God's love and protection of His people was given by Jesus, as He told the people that because they had rejected God, He was rejecting them.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (Mat. 23:37-38).

If these things are done, the individual learns to always put his total trust in God. God will come first in his life, no matter what happens to him. He can endure temptations and persecution (Mat. 10:28). His

whole focus rests in pleasing God by dedicated service to Him (Mat. 6:33), and his twinge of doubt will be gone.

This lack of true faith in God helps to explain why many Christians go back into the world. Without a sure trust in the Redeemer, it becomes easier to follow the ways of the world, to question God's existence, to begin to think that not all the Bible is from God, and to drift away from God. Those with this type of faith were described by Jesus in the parable of the sower.

They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection (Luke 8:13-14).

Daniel's faith leaves us an example of how our faith must be sure and steadfast.

Darius' question brings to mind another question: "How did the ruler know so much about Daniel's service to God?" This has been answered already; it was by Daniel's example. How much easier would it have been for Daniel to simply stop praying to God for the allotted time? No doubt God would have understood. If Daniel felt the need to pray, why did he not shut his windows so know one would know he was violating the decree? Daniel believed God. He trusted that, come what may, God would deliver him. His course in life was set on serving God with all his being. It surely could be said of Daniel as it was of Abraham: "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God" (Heb. 11:10).

The account of Daniel's exemplary life stands to underscore Paul's comment to the brethren at Rome. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Christians are to be an example to those about them. By Daniel's example rulers and kings came to know the glory and power of God. Tens of thousands of people in their kingdoms came to know about Daniel's God. No doubt Jews who were spread throughout the captivity were encouraged and strengthened by the report of this faithful follower of God.

Being an example to others was one of the great teachings of Jesus.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the

world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:13-16).

Christians today **need** to feel the full weight of being an example to those about them. Daniel’s adversaries knew the time and place to look for Daniel to pray to God. Friends, family, and neighbors ought to know where Christians will be when it is time for the saints to assemble. Many a lesson is preached at service times, by an empty garage, and a full parking lot at the meeting house. Those in the world know what Christians claim to be, and watch to see if the claims are more than just talk. More Daniels are needed today.

Children learn to put God first in their lives—if they have godly parents who teach them by example to “seek first the kingdom of God.” Recreation, school, family activities, et al., are not wrong in themselves; however, they must be kept in the proper prospective. Children who are taught that assembling with the saints takes precedence over everything else will soon govern themselves on such occasions just as Daniel. Parents will find that they are no longer the *bad guys*, for the children will desire to put God first.

Peter wrote of how Christian women can live to influence their non-Christian husbands to seek 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 (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Many godly women have followed the words of this passage, and have been able to win their mates to God.

Countless numbers of souls have been brought to God by Christians who remembered to set the proper example to the world. Each person exerts an influence on others more than he may ever know. There are fellow employees, doctors, nurses, paper boys, teammates, school friends; on and on the list goes. One Christian can influence so many.

CONCLUSION

Daniel’s life in the beginning was not one that many would desire to have. His country was at war and losing. He was taken captive and led away to a strange and terrible land. He suffered many great hurts both mentally and physically. Yet, in the face of all these obstacles, he

remained faithful to God. Because of his great love and devotion to God, he was blessed by God. He was able to gain influence in two great kingdoms of people.

The question asked by Darius was and is a great question. Men today wonder about God, fail to fully trust in Him, and doubt His power. All must learn, as did Darius, that God does have all power, and He can deliver us from harm.

The questions raised by Darius' question strike to the heart of every Christian. A true child of God must have complete trust in God—a trust in God that will cause his life to be an example to the world.

The answer to the question, “Is thy God able to deliver thee?” can be answered today as it was by Daniel, with a resounding **yes!** God is able to deliver man from sin. He has provided the sacrifice and given man the Bible to study and obey.

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“WHAT SHALL BE THE END OF THESE THINGS?”

DANIEL 12:8

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INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of Daniel is the shortest of the book with only thirteen verses. This chapter is the continuation and conclusion of the vision begun in Daniel 10:1. A natural and logical beginning for Daniel 12 would have been to initiate at verse 5 with verses 1-4 as a part of chapter 11. But this writer’s task is the exposition of verse 8. We shall investigate the great question of “What *shall be* the end of these *things*?” utilizing six points: time, tribulation, termination, transformation, interrogation, and salvation.

TIME

The role of time as it relates to our study of the question and the Book of Daniel is of great importance. The framework of time regarding the visions of the prophet Daniel can assist the reader in avoiding speculative and premillennial views about future prophecy.

The time bound visions of Daniel have a definite starting point and ending point that is to be respected by every honest student (Pro. 23:23). Brother Dub McClish comments on the time element of Daniel:

It is important to note that the time span covered by the book of Daniel is circumscribed and limited by events related to these four empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the last of which was the Roman Empire. Just as the beginning point of Daniel's prophecy is identified as the Babylonian Empire, the ending point is also identified as sometime in the Roman Empire and no later (209)!

The late and lamented brother Franklin Camp stated:

To see beyond the Roman Empire to the setting up of the kingdom of God—the Gentiles pointing down as still future, is to misread everything that is back here (Compact Disc Series on Ezekiel & Daniel).

Jim McGuiggan stated:

The scope of the book has consistently been from Babylon (at the earliest) to Rome (at the latest). See this in Chapters 2 and 7. In Chapter 8 we go from Persian Persia to the Seleucids. In Chapter 9 we went from Persia to Rome. In Chapters 10 through 12 we do the same thing—from Persia to Rome (159).

Being mindful of the time bound element within the visions of Daniel the prophet, the premillennialist can **not** build a case for his mythical one thousand year literal future kingdom! The timetable of God simply will **not** allow it! The reason is that the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God and the enthronement of His/David's Son, the Messiah/Christ, took place in the days of the Roman *kings* “in the latter days” of Daniel's people, the Jews, long since passed! So the question is not about the end of the present generation or some future generation to come!

TRIBULATION

In scrutinizing the question “What *shall be* the end of these *things*?” Let the reader return to the “at that time” in Daniel 12:1. It is the conviction of this writer that the time period under consideration is a reference to the Roman Empire's rule over Palestine. The archangel Michael was to stand up for God's people; he was to keep vigilant watch over God's people. In spite of Michael's watch and care, this would be a time of terror and tribulation for God's people. This is not tribulation according to the theories of the Millennialists.

Foy E. Wallace, Jr., stated:

This passage refers to the "time of trouble," which, according to millennialists, means the "great tribulation" preceding the millennium. But it will be observed that in this "time of trouble" both the righteous and the wicked are raised. The millennial theory requires that the righteous be raised first, then the thousand years, and after the millennium the resurrection of the wicked, hence the resurrection of the wicked would not occur until a thousand years after the "tribulation." But Dan. 12 has the wicked raised "in" this time of trouble along with the righteous. So it cannot be the "millennial tribulation" (519).

The extent of this trouble/tribulation is described in Holy Writ as "such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1). This entire vision concerns the Jewish nation until they ceased as a nation. Keep in mind what was told Daniel: "Understand what shall befall thy people [Jews] in the latter days [Jewish latter days]" (Dan. 10:14). In spite of Michael's help, this would be a time of terrible trouble for God's people: "Such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time." This would be the clash between the Jews and the Romans in the Roman occupation of Palestine that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem as a city and of Israel as a nation in A.D. 70.

Burton Coffman states:

At that time...there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time, and at that time thy people shall be delivered...." Now, when was that? Christ said it would occur at the destruction of Jerusalem, which we can definitely pinpoint as an event occurring in A. D. 70. In his prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ said: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as there hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21). Thus the very terminology of Daniel's prophecy was used by the Lord and applied to the end of Jerusalem (with overtones of the Final Judgment also) (181).

The very thought of *tribulation* had a familiar sound to Daniel. He experienced dreadful hardships via the handiwork of Nebuchadnezzar. Without a doubt, Daniel must have had a difficult time imaging *tribulation* worse than that which he had already suffered! The tribulation of which he seemed accustomed was nothing compared to the tribulation that was ahead for his people (Israel). How great the burden must have been for Daniel to receive this traumatic revelation and to convey it to his own people! We are reminded of the burden born by faithful Gospel preachers who love the souls of men—**yet knowing the**

terror of the Lord—to persuade men to obedience in view of the tribulation that awaits the ungodly (John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:11).

TERMINATION

The tribulation of God's people during the Roman rule also marked the ultimate termination of the Jewish state. One of the benefits of the fall of Jerusalem was the separation of Judaism from Christianity. Judaism was a God-ordained religion, and this fact made it possible for Judaizing teachers to deceive and confuse people as long as the temple stood erect. It was almost impossible to convince Jews to lay aside Judaism that was God-ordained and convert to what was seemingly an "upstart and new religion," the church of Christ. However, when Jerusalem acquiesced to its Roman foe, the temple was destroyed, and no longer could a Jew trace his birth lineage, the spiritual confusion ceased.

The prophecies of the Old Testament foretold of the establishment of another kingdom (Dan. 2, 7, 9; Isa. 2:1-4). This kingdom is the church of Christ. The mere fact that the church of Christ had its roots in Judaism did not mean that it was a continuance of it, or just another advancement within it. The Jewish state was once and for all time terminated by God's own instruments in the form of Titus and his army in A.D. 70! When Jerusalem fell, Judaism went down to rise no more, leaving only the kingdom that Daniel saw remaining—one that could not be destroyed. The fall of Jerusalem closed the confusing door of Judaism and left only the one church of Christ remaining.

Dub McClish's comments on the termination of Jerusalem and the vision of Daniel:

In almost the closing words of the book Daniel was told by the angelic announcer that the "end of these wonders" (i.e., the wonders revealed in chapters 10-12, or perhaps the entire book) would coincide with "when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people." This would be "the time when all these things shall be finished" (Dan. 12:6-7). Thus, when the Jews were finally and irretrievably broken (by the Roman Legions in A.D. 70), the visions of the book of Daniel would be fulfilled and finished (209-210).

TRANSFORMATION

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the

dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *even* to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased (Dan. 12:1-4).

The eternal kingdom (thus, the consummation of God's promise in Daniel 2:44) had been in existence for forty years when the Romans overran Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Those in the kingdom, not merely Jews according to the flesh, constituted God's people at the time of that great conflagration. Those referred to here as *thy people* who would be delivered because they were "found written in the book" were the Christians who escaped Jerusalem before it fell. These were the people of God who completed the transformation from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. These were those whose names were written in the Book. They may have seemed dead, but they have been resurrected. This (Dan. 12:2) is **not** a passage about universal resurrection. The text says **many, not all**, shall awake from their graves. These were they who endured sufferings and persecution and would not deny their Lord (Col. 1:13; Dan. 12:1; 1 Pet. 4:16)! The ultimate revival of Israel as a remnant would and could only see life through the resurrected Redeemer (Rom. 1:4)!

Again Dub McClish states:

The people of God were so forlorn under the Gentile domination of the exile that it appeared that they had died as a nation, never to rise again. Isaiah used the resurrection figure of the ungodly heathen nations: "They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise" (Isa. 26:14). Not so with God's chosen nation—they would rise as it were from their place "in the dust." It is not God's fault that the Jews incorrectly assume that these promises referred to the establishment of an earthly political kingdom with a king to match in the Messiah. Sadly, literal Israel would reject and crucify the very one who came to give them the real kingdom of God, even as he tried to teach them that God's eternal kingdom would be spiritual rather than political. This "resurrection" occurred when the Christ came and established His everlasting **spiritual** kingdom (John 18:36, God's **spiritual** Israel, as noted above). His people were at last given perpetual independence and sovereignty which overrides all nations and their territorial boundaries (Dan. 2:44). No wonder Peter called the church God's "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9)! (216).

INTERROGATION

Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And *one* said to the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, How long *shall it be to* the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which *was* upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that *it shall be* for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these *things* shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what *shall be* the end of these *things*? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand (Dan. 12:5-10).

Remember how the vision began? Daniel saw a man clothed in linen, with a bright countenance, standing by the river. Now at the end he sees two angels with him. He asks the man clothed in linen, “How long shall it be until these things are over?” If one has carefully followed the character of the vision, he can understand the question. This is a time of trouble for Daniel’s people such as they have never passed through before. This troubles Daniel, and he identifies with them and asks, “How long will it be? How long till the end of these amazing things?” The man clothed in linen raised his right hand to indicate the weight of his words as a guarantee. It is much as it was in the days of Jesus in the flesh when He used to say, “Verily, verily I say to you.” The guarantee is made with an upraised hand. “When these things begin,” he says, they will run for “a time, two times, and half a time.” We have understood already from Daniel that this means three-and-a-half years. A *time* is a year. When they are finished, the power of the holy people, the Jews, will be shattered. Judaism will be broken and defeated as never before. The end of the week accomplishes the end of Judaism and the power of Israel. Daniel interrupts the man clothed in linen:

And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what *shall be* the end of these *things*? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand (Dan. 12:8-10).

Matthew Henry observed concerning Daniel’s perplexity: “The best men are often much at a loss in their inquiries concerning divine things, and meet with that which they do not understand” (750).

Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary states:

There is no need of a fuller explanation as to the *time*; for when the predictions so far given shall have come to pass, the godly shall be “purified” by the foretold trials and shall understand that the end is at hand; but the wicked shall not understand, and so shall rush on to their own ruin.

Albert Barnes states:

Daniel, perplexed and overwhelmed with these strange predictions, hearing what was said about the time, but not understanding it, asks with intense interest when the end of these things should be, Daniel 12:8. He had heard the reply of the angel, but it conveyed no idea to his mind. He was deeply solicitous to look into the future, and to ascertain when these events would end, and what would be their termination. The answer to his anxious, earnest inquiry, is contained in Daniel 12:9-13, and embraces several points—giving sonic further information, but still evidently designed to leave the matter obscure in many respects (836-837).

Daniel interrogates for more information. He says, “Lord, I do not understand what you mean about ‘the shattering of the power of the holy people.’” The man clothed in linen says, “Daniel, remember, there is no more revelation to you out of the book. The book is closed; I will not tell you any more.” The instruction is that it will be necessary to study and meditate what has already been given you. From your scrutiny of this there will be the following result: “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand” (Dan. 12:10). God assured him that many would be saved (*purified*) but that the wicked would continue to do *wickedly*. Then He added that the wicked could not *understand* this prophecy but the saved could because they were *wise*—spiritually enlightened. The real problem unbelievers have with the Bible is not intellectual—it is spiritual blindness. 1 Corinthians 2:14 states: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

Many shall read it, study it, and search it through, and it will have a very interesting three-fold effect upon them: First, they will **interact with the book**. They will purify themselves by reading the cleansing

Word of God. God's Word is always a cleansing agent. By obedience they would be purified from within. Second, they will **obey the Word** they read and **make themselves white**. The outer life would become clean, and they would be made white. They will be refined, becoming better people. This is always true with the Word of God, if men follow it. Third, there is **another class** of persons who will **read the book but not understand**. They shall do wickedly. The wicked shall do wickedly. These people are wicked because they do wickedly. It says the wicked are not wicked because they do wicked things, but they do wicked things because they are already wicked. What is being wicked? This is someone who will not listen to God; that is a wicked person. A wicked person is one wicked in thought and therefore does wicked things. His deeds become wicked because his thoughts are already wicked. "For, lo, the wicked bend *their* bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart" (Psa. 11:2).

SALVATION

A careful examination of Revelation 10:7 and Ephesians 3:1-6 offer biblical insight into our study of Daniel's question. "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." This mystery of God is unfolded in Ephesians 3:1-6:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

Daniel foretold of the great salvation (1 Pet. 1:10-12), and the present generation would do well to take advantage of the grand invitation to hear the good news concerning the Messiah (Rom. 10:17). One must act upon this news by the demonstration of an active faith (John 8:24). Next, this active faith must manifest itself in confessing the sweetest name on mortal tongue—Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). In addition to confessing the name of Christ, one must repent of his sins and be baptized into Christ (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38). The faith that saves is

the faith that obeys. The obedient soul is then added into the kingdom of which Daniel and all of the prophets foretold (Acts 2:47).

When New Testament revelation was completed and Jewish state destroyed, it left nothing but the church of Christ as the last remaining kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Mat. 16:18). Divine revelation states that this is God’s way of offering hope and mercy to an entire world (Eph. 1:21-22; Rom. 8:24; 1 Cor. 12:13). Daniel saw things too wonderful to fully understand and things too fearful to find rest in his spirit.

Our generation is extremely fortunate to stand on the Books of the New Testament and trace back to Daniel’s dilemma of inquiry for his people. God Almighty saw where Daniel (the man) could not clearly view—that mankind’s only hope of salvation would be tied to the cross of King Jesus over all others. With Jesus as King over His kingdom the true Israel of God would discover that captivity is now captive and that the joy of eternal salvation is now available.

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“CAN TWO WALK TOGETHER, EXCEPT THEY BE AGREED?”

AMOS 3:3

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INTRODUCTION

In beginning our study, let us first establish the context of the verse that gives us our title for this chapter. In Amos 3:1 the prophet declares God's right to judge Israel. He proves His right to be their judge by reminding them of His love for them, the proof of which began when He delivered them from Egyptian bondage. Israel, therefore, was special to Him—they were family (v. 2), although as a people their population was not large, and in the estimation of the world they had accomplished nothing great. However, God chose them out of all the people of the world for a special relationship with and work for Him. The Jews to whom Amos prophesied needed the previously-noted information to remind them that any good accomplished by them or any blessing they enjoyed was because of and from God. Therefore, when Jews chose to disobey Him, He had every right and obligation to punish them. Before Israel entered the Land of Promise, Moses had declared to the Israelites:

The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them (Deu. 7:7-11).

Thus, Amos reminds Israel of their unique relationship with God—their fellowship or their *walking together* with Him. However, the great privilege of being God's children brought upon them a greater responsibility (Jam. 3:1). Because of God's love for Israel, as well as His special provisions for them, He, therefore, had the right and obligation to punish them when they transgressed His Will. While there were individual exceptions, for hundreds of years Israel routinely chose to violate God's law. In love with and enjoying their rebellion against God, they ignored the message of repentance preached to them by God's prophets. Regarding these matters of Israel's history, the New Testament evangelist Stephen rhetorically asked the Jews of his day:

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept *it* (Acts 7:52-53).

Because of Israel's rebellious history and their continuation in sin, the rhetorical question of Amos 3:3 is posed to Israel for their sober and serious consideration. This is the context of the question that serves as the title for this chapter.

WHAT DOES WALKING TOGETHER MEAN?

Scriptural fellowship, cooperation, and unity come into existence and continue to obtain between and among people because they are in agreement. The same is true regarding Israel's walk with God. As one has astutely observed: "Two people cannot walk together if they are going in opposite directions." Israel was not in agreement with God; thus she was not in fellowship with God. She was going in the opposite

direction from God. Of course, sinful Israel did not see herself going in the reverse direction from God. Therefore, they did not consider themselves out of fellowship with Him. Because of their erroneous view of their spiritual condition, Amos (as is true of all God's faithful prophets) had the responsibility to declare God's charges against Israel and prove such to be the case. Today, Christians (especially gospel preachers and elders) can do no less than God's prophets of old did and remain in fellowship with God and the faithful members of His church (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-12; 2 John 8-11). This is an important part of preaching the whole counsel of God and faithfully shepherding His flock—the church (Acts 20:26-28; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Accordingly, we see in Amos' message the great truth that men are in fellowship with God **only** as they comply with His Will. Also, we learn from Amos, as elsewhere in the Scriptures, that when men cease to obey God in obligatory matters, they lose their fellowship with Him. Simply put, men can never be in fellowship with God while they are disobedient to Him. This is the reason Jesus put the following rhetorical questions to certain Jews during His earthly ministry: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Furthermore, we also learn that, when sinful men repent of their sins, God is always ready to forgive them. At least one more very important point should be emphasized—God's longsuffering with sinful man will end. When His longsuffering terminates, God will punish those who have refused to repent of their wicked conduct. This last point is the critical one Amos is attempting to impress on the minds of his auditors.

Having understood that *walking together* is synonymous with fellowship between God and men as well as men with men, we now note *agreed* in Amos 3:3. *Agreed* establishes the basis by which God and men are in fellowship. Men must *agree* to God's terms and submit to them for fellowship to be established between the two parties. God is the offended party. Man, by sinning, is the offender (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17; Rom. 3:23; 6:23). God sets the terms of the agreement (in our day the New Testament—Jam. 1:25; John 12:48; Heb. 9:15-17). This is the case because He is God—no other reason is needed. It is man's responsibility to comply with God's terms of pardon (John 14:15; Heb. 5:9; 2 The. 1:7-8; Rom. 1:16). In the New Testament the apostle John wrote to Christians saying:

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth,

and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 8-11).

In his first epistle John wrote on the subject of fellowship when he penned:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

Among other things, we learn from the preceding material that God’s authoritative Word, man’s obedience to it, and the resultant fellowship (men with God and men with other men who, themselves, are obedient to God) are never mutually exclusive. The rhetorical question propounded by Amos to Israel in the long ago is as relevant and needful today to the spiritual health of spiritual Israel, the church, as the air we breathe is to our physical bodies. For at present in the Lord’s church there is much confusion and misunderstanding regarding who is in fellowship with God and who is not (who is a Christian and who is not). It, therefore, should not surprise anyone that at the same time there is confusion over fellowship and unity, there is also a great misunderstanding and disagreement pertaining to the relationship and bearing of Bible doctrine on unity and fellowship with God and between Christians (Bible authority and how the Bible authorizes as well as love’s relationship to said authority). With these realities before us, the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to the study of Amos 3:3 as it applies to *agreement* between God and men, as well as men *walking together* or in fellowship and unity with one another.

ELLOWSHIP DEFINED

Koinonia is the most well-known Greek word rendered “fellowship” in the New Testament. However, in the same sacred covenant there is another Greek word translated “fellowship.” It is *metoche*. This Greek term is rendered into English with basically the same words that translate *koinonia*. Of course, each of these two Greek words appear in their different forms in the New Testament. One may consult any reputable Greek-English lexicon regarding the meaning of these words. In doing so it will be discovered that *koinonia* and *metoche* mean “joint

participation, community, association, partner, partaker, fellowship, and sharing.”

Luke recorded the early church’s steadfast adherence, not only to the apostles’ doctrine, but also the apostles’ fellowship (Acts 2:42). The bolded words in the following Scriptures indicate the different areas of fellowship among Christians of the first century.

1. 1 Corinthians 10:16: “**communion** of the blood” and “**communion** of the body.” Here is fellowship in observance of the Lord’s Supper and by implication in the worship of God.
2. Romans 15:26: “a certain **contribution** for the poor saints.” This indicates fellowship among Christians in helping needy saints. Also see, 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 9:13.
3. Philippians 1:5: “For your **fellowship** in the gospel.” Paul is noting the cooperation existing among brethren relative to his support in his proclamation of the Gospel.

By these Scriptures, and others of like nature, we come to understand that Christians participate jointly or share in worship, benevolence, and preaching the gospel as well as every good word and work (Col. 1:10; 2 The. 2:17). In the Greek New Testament *koinonia* is also found in the following passages of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 6:14; 13:14, Galatians 2:9, Philippians 2:1; 3:10, Philemon 6, Hebrews 13:16.

CONDITIONS THAT MAN MUST MEET

Now that we have learned from the New Testament what fellowship meant to Christians in the first century, we turn our attention to **how** one is brought into *agreement* (fellowship) with God. The apostle John teaches us that fellowship with God is contingent on a person “walk[ing] in the light, as he [Christ] is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Throughout the Bible, and especially the New Testament, light is used as a synonym for truth (Luke 1:79; John 8:19; Acts 13:47; 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; 2 Tim. 1:10). John also wrote of certain ones who were “walking in truth” (2 John 4). Of the early church Luke wrote, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). With the previous verses in mind, please consider the two questions to follow. In the light of the Scriptures and reason, is it possible to conceive of Christians “walk[ing] in the light” or “walking in truth” and **not** “continu[ing] stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship”? Or, is it scriptural and rational for one to think that persons in the early church “continued stedfastly in the

apostles' doctrine and fellowship" while **not** "walk[ing] in the light" or "walking in truth"? Obviously, Acts 2:42, 1 John 1:7, and 2 John 4 are commentaries on one another as to what "walk[ing] in the light," "walking in truth," and "continu[ing] stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine" mean. Among other things we conclude from these verses that conducting one's life according to the Truth of God's Word (submitting to His authority) is a condition of fellowship with God (John 8:31-32; 17:17; Ecc. 12:13; Heb. 5:9; Col. 3:17; 1 John 1:3). Indeed, obedience to God's Word is the singular proof of one's love for and faith in God, as well as the things of God (John 14:15; Jam. 2:14-26). The order is this: (1) correct understanding of, belief in, and obedience to the Truth of the Gospel, (2) fellowship with God is produced thereby, and (3) fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God is a reality. As has been stated many times in such studies of fellowship between men and God and men and men—fellowship is first **vertical** (men coming into fellowship with God), then **horizontal** (men coming into fellowship with each other because of their fellowship with God).

FELLOWSHIP HAS ITS LIMITS

There is a unity among men that is acceptable to (authorized by) God and a unity that is not. There is a division among men that is acceptable to (authorized by) God and a division that is not. Thus, we may conclude that there is a unity as well as a division between and among men authorized by God as well as a unity and a division that is not (John 17:17-21; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 2 The. 2:5-16; Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20). We are, therefore, very interested in learning at what point one attains to fellowship with God as well as other men who are in fellowship with Him. Also, once fellowship with God is established, we are greatly concerned about maintaining fellowship with Him. Moreover, we are equally concerned regarding when fellowship with God, and thus with men who are in fellowship with Him, ceases.

God's Law of Inclusion

Certainly no atheist, agnostic, or one who does not believe in the Deity of Christ can have fellowship with God (Psa. 14:1; John 1:1-2; 8:24; 20:30-31; Rom. 1:18-32; Phi. 2:5). Furthermore, one who rejects the virgin birth of Jesus, His sinless life, vicarious death, resurrection from the dead, authority, ascension, and coronation cannot attain to fellowship with God (Mat. 1:18-25; 28:18-20; Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51;

John 1:1-2; Acts 2:22-36; 1 Cor. 15:12-19; Phi. 2:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 2:9; 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). Also, one who refuses to obey Jesus in repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized in water into Christ for the remission of sins cannot attain to fellowship with God (Mat. 7:21-23; John 3:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 17:30-31; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-5; 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12; 2 The. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 3:21). Moreover, anyone who does not understand the Bible's teaching concerning Christ's church as the singular realm of those saved by Christ is not in fellowship with God. In other words, one must know that the church of Christ (as defined and employed in the New Testament) is composed of "Christians only and the only Christians" (Mat. 16:18; Acts 20:28; 2:47; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23-27; Col. 1:18).

Stated candidly, the church of Christ is not a denomination. It is no part of the whole. All the saved are in the church of Christ, and no saved person is outside of the church of Christ. To be a member of any sectarian denomination is equivalent to being lost and on the road to hell. The denominational concept of the church is foreign to New Testament teaching regarding the church. The origin of so-called sectarian denominational Christianity was the fermented minds of men who possessed no or little respect for biblical authority. Moreover, they are as ignorant, for whatever reason, of "rightly dividing the word of truth" as a squirrel is of differential and integral calculus (2 Tim. 2:15). Any member of the Lord's church that supports, encourages, or in any way aids and abets a denomination is engaging in sin and is subject to the discipline set out on the pages of the New Testament. The attitude in faithful members of the church that should obtain toward sectarian denominationalism was well stated by the late Guy N. Woods 64 years ago when wrote:

Denominationalism is the curse and bane of the age. So long as it remains to mislead and deceive the people, our work will not be finished. It is our duty fearlessly to unsheath the sword of the spirit, boldly go forth to battle, and plunge it into the very heart of sectarianism, until, mangled and bleeding, it is left to die in its own shame (57).

The following conclusion is deduced on the basis of the totality of the information contained in the New Testament of Jesus Christ as to the exact moment one attains fellowship with God. What persons are authorized, ready, or qualified to come into fellowship with God? The answer is: any person who has believed in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24; Rom. 10:9-10, 17; Heb. 11:1, 6), repented of sin—has

turned one's life from the practice of sin—(Acts 17:30), and confessed Christ to be the Son of God (Rom. 10:10). The person who has complied with the previous steps or conditions set out for sinful man by God is ready (qualified or authorized) to become a child of God or attain fellowship with God. What is the final step to be taken to obtain salvation and thereby fellowship with God? It is baptism in water by the authority of Christ into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for (unto, in order to, with a view to) the remission or forgiveness of sins. This is the baptism of the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Rom. 1:16). It is the baptism seen on Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41) and the baptism Saul was instructed to do (Acts 22:16). It is the baptism which saves us (1 Pet. 3:21) and the one baptism of Ephesians 4:4. Water baptism is, therefore, the point, moment, or last step taken at which Christ saves one from sin, adding him/her to His church. Thereby and only thereby is anyone saved by Jesus Christ and brought into fellowship with God (Acts 2:41, 47). Again, baptism is the only doorway into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). It is in Christ where God has located "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places"—salvation and fellowship with God resulting therefrom, and thus two of the greatest of God's blessings for man (Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:10; Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 1:16). We may call what we have studied God's law of inclusion.

God's Law of Exclusion

Let us turn our attention to God's law of exclusion. Clearly revealed in the New Testament are proofs that there is such a law. Please consider Matthew 18:15-17:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Of this passage J. W. McGarvey wrote:

In other words, when a man who has sinned against his brother refuses to hear the church, he is to be treated as we properly treat heathen men and publicans, or men of wicked habits. We have known persons to express a doubt whether this implies an exclusion of the sinning party from the fellowship of the church; but to deny that it does would involve a great absurdity. It would require the offended party to live in the church with a man whom he justly treats as though he were a

heathen and a publican; and it would require the church to hold in her fellowship men who are rightly so treated by her own members. Surely if heathen men and impenitent publicans are to be kept out of the church, disciples who deserve to be treated by their brethren as heathen and publican must be cut off from the church (159).

How did the Jews treat a heathen and a publican? The answer is a simple one—they had nothing to do with them. A good example of this is seen in the events involved in the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10 and 11). To get the apostle Peter to understand that uncircumcised Gentiles (the heathen) had a right to hear the gospel and be saved by obedience to it, God caused Peter to see the same vision three times. The design of the vision was to lead Peter to understand that, what had been unclean and avoided by the Jews under the Law of Moses, God had now cleansed, and they were not to be rejected. However, Peter responded that he had never partaken of that which Moses' law had declared to be unclean. When messengers from Cornelius arrived where Peter was residing, the Holy Spirit directed Peter to go with them. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Peter, with six Jewish male witnesses accompanying him, came to the house of Cornelius. Peter reminded Cornelius of the following fact regarding the lack of association the Jews had with uncircumcised Gentiles. He said, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Our point just here is this: the Jews did not "keep company" or "come unto one of another nation." They had no fellowship with the uncircumcised Gentiles. Therefore, when Jesus states that one who has the church's fellowship withdrawn from him is to be treated as a heathen and a publican, we understand from the totality of the Scriptures' teaching on the subject that the faithful are not to "keep company" or "come unto one" from which the fellowship of the church has been scripturally withdrawn.

As another proof of God's law of exclusion, we note what the inspired apostle wrote to the church in Corinth about the man who had sinned in having his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1). The apostle Paul wrote that "with such an one no not to eat" and "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (5:11, 13). *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* has this to say about the meaning of "might be taken away from you" found in 1 Corinthians 5:2. It means: "To remove, to cast out

from the church" (16). Concerning the meaning of "Purge out therefore the old leaven" of 1 Corinthians 5:7, Thayer tells us it is "by the removal of which something is made clean" (195). Obviously, it is possible that a child of God may so conduct himself in a way that he is unfit to be in fellowship with God and those who continue in fellowship with Him. In such cases the church has the God-given obligation to exclude such persons from her fellowship. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 The. 3:6). This passage itself is also proof of the fact that God has a law of exclusion.

Another passage of Scripture proving God's law of exclusion is 2 John 9-11:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

The late Thomas B. Warren wrote concerning the meaning of the apostle in these verses:

The passage plainly teaches that whosoever presumptuously goes forward and does not abide in the teaching of Christ (that is, does that which the Bible does not authorize) does not "have God" (does not have God's approval) in the doing of it. It is further clear that if anyone comes and does not bring this teaching, then faithful children of God are neither to receive him into their houses nor to give him greeting. This is the case because the one who gives the greeting is a partaker in (that is, has fellowship with) his evil works. Therefore, it is clear that the break in fellowship must come at the point where one's conviction must be compromised in order for the fellowship to be maintained in regard to the matter which is involved. So, one must no longer extend "the right hand of Christian fellowship" to a disciple when his beliefs and practices force one to join in matters which are opposed to scriptural teaching (such as: instrumental music, support of missionary societies, and/or other unscriptural institutions or activities from the church treasury) (37-38).

Other passages which prove that God has a law of exclusion (a lack of space forbids commenting on them) are Romans 16:17-18, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Titus 3:10-11, Ephesians 5:11-12. However,

the message conveyed by the previous passages is more than sufficient to prove that there is a law of exclusion taught in the Scriptures.

We may correctly conclude that, just as surely as men must meet God's conditions in His law of inclusion to be in fellowship with Him and all others who are in fellowship with Him, when men violate God's law of exclusion, their fellowship with God ceases and should cease with those who remain in fellowship with God.

ALL DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN BRETHREN IS NOT SIN

At this juncture in our study it is important to note the following salient point. There is a **kind** of disagreement between brethren that should not cause men to be out of fellowship with God and one another. For example: regarding Barnabas' and Paul's preparation for their second preaching tour, Luke informs us:

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches (Acts 15:37-41).

Had not Jesus prayed that all those who believe on Him through His Word "be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21)? Also, in writing to the Corinthians did not Paul himself write to them saying:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10)?

By inspiration the apostle Peter wrote: "Finally, *be ye* all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, *be* pitiful, *be* courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8). It is rather obvious, even to the casual reader, that Paul and Barnabas did not "speak the same thing." They were divided and not "perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment" regarding whether John Mark should company with them or not on their proposed second preaching tour. In the matter of his separation from Barnabas and vice versa, was Paul living contrary to what he wrote to the Corinthians? Was he guilty of hypocrisy?

Furthermore, did the church in Antioch condone Paul's and Barnabas' decision to separate from one another because they could not see eye-to-eye regarding John Mark being a part of the second preaching tour? Thereby, did the church aid and abet a sinful division between these two brethren? If they were in sin because of their division, why did not the church in Antioch exercise church discipline on them? If Paul, Barnabas, and the church in Antioch were practicing that which was not authorized by Christ and, in fact, were condemned by Him, why did not some other apostle withstand all of them "to the face" even as Paul did to Peter because of Peter's sin (Gal. 2:11-14)? On the other hand, if Paul and Barnabas did not violate the Scriptures regarding fellowship with one another when they separated over John Mark, how do we know they did not?

Is there any indication in the divine record that Paul, Barnabas, John Mark, or the church in Antioch of Syria was guilty of sinful motives or actions? Were they divided over anything God obligates one to do to be saved or remain saved? The answer to these questions is this: the divine record indicates no sinful disposition of heart or action on the part of any of the parties involved.

It must be the case then that the division existing between Paul and Barnabas because of John Mark had not one thing to do with what one must do to be saved from sin or to remain in fellowship with God and others who are in fellowship with God. Stated another way, Paul's and Barnabas' differences were not over obligatory matters but over matters of option (expediency). Paul did not think that taking John Mark on the second tour would expedite or be advantageous to their obligation to preach the Gospel. Barnabas did not think John Mark's presence would be inexpedient. Thus, Barnabas *opted* to take John Mark on the second preaching tour. We understand, then, this division between Barnabas and Paul was over an optional matter and not an obligatory one. The unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17 and the division that Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:10 dealt with violations of obligatory matters. Paul and Barnabas were not guilty of terminating their association, as far as the second preaching tour was concerned, because one taught that baptism is for the remission of sin and the other taught that it was not. Division over baptism would break fellowship because it would be over a matter of salvation—an obligatory matter. That was not the case with the division between Barnabas and Saul.

It must be pointed out that there is no evidence that Paul and Barnabas had a sinful attitude toward one another. Neither one of these good men engaged in slandering one another, spreading malicious lies about one another, backbiting, talebearing, or any kind of character assassination. Nothing of the kind is evidenced in the Scriptures. To the contrary, the church sent Barnabas and Silas on the second preaching tour, and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cypress to preach the gospel. Luke records that the church *recommended* both gospel-preaching efforts. This disagreement and its consequent division between Paul and Barnabas resulted in two efforts to preach the gospel rather than one, and both were approved by the church in Antioch. We may then conclude that while the basic teaching of Amos 3:3 in this given situation remains true—Paul and Barnabas could not walk together except they be agreed on John Mark—there was no sin involved in the disagreement. This was the case because it did not involve a disagreement over obligatory matters—what God obligates man to do to be saved and remain saved. Among other things we should learn from the case of Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark that great and good men have authority from God to disagree in matters of expediency or options to the point that they may not be able to work together, but with all other things being scripturally equal, they can part company and continue in fellowship with God, one another, and all others who are fellowship with God.

We, therefore, must make a difference between divisions that are sinful, and what makes them sinful, and divisions that are not and why they are not. The same is true regarding unity. We do not seek unity at any price. Biblical unity is based upon all men agreeing to abide by the obligatory matters of the New Testament and allowing liberty in optional matters. Thus, there may be all sorts of diverse views on **how** to discharge an obligation to God, but, for instance, where the Bible has not told us **how** to do it, people are free to disagree regarding the different options as long as some one does not seek to bind what is optional on others as if it were obligatory. To do so would be to practice a form of *anti-ism* of some sort or the other. On the other hand, those who desire to handle obligatory matters as if they were optional will, if their doctrine is accepted, loose men from what the Bible has bound on them. This is *liberalism* of some kind or another. Neither *anti-ism* nor *liberalism* is acceptable to God because persons practicing either view on whatever subject are not content with God's laws and

seek to usurp God in legislating for Him—a prerogative he reserves only for Himself.

It should be obvious at this point in our study that it is impossible to understand biblical fellowship and not understand the importance of **how** the Bible authorizes as well as how we ascertain its authority. Not knowing how the Bible authorizes causes well-meaning people to unite on things not authorized in the Scriptures and allows for the same people to divide over matters wherein they had authority to differ without the loss of fellowship with God. Paul and Barnabas had authority from God to differ over matters of option—yes, to the point of not being able to work together. However, they remained in fellowship with God. Such was not the case with the matters addressed by Paul of which the Corinthian brethren differed. Their differences concerned matters of obligation (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

CONCLUSION

“Can two walk together except they are agreed?” The answer is **no**. Agreement is a basic and fundamental ingredient to fellowship with God and those in fellowship with Him—to the unity or oneness of the church. However, whether it is a separation brought on because of a violation of an obligatory matter, which violation causes a break in fellowship with God and others who are in fellowship with Him, or simply a division over which option is more expedient than another (and thus does not necessarily break fellowship with God and men who are in fellowship with Him) must be determined by knowing how the Bible authorizes as well as respect for its authority. Allowing for all other things to be scripturally equal, this is the only way we may distinguish between obligatory and optional matters (helps or aids in discharging our obligations to God). Until men learn how the Bible authorizes they are destined to draw lines of fellowship shorter or longer than God’s biblical tether—His perfect law of liberty (Jam. 1:25). The sad consequences of such actions are evident from the sacred writings as well as in the history of the restored church of Christ over the past 200 years. We should therefore labor to understand that there can be and ought to be unity and diversity in matters such as the difference between Barnabas and Paul over John Mark (a difference that arose between Barnabas and Paul that pertained to what is the best option to discharge a God-given obligation). However, there can never be “unity in diversity” in matters of obligation (things God obligates us

to do to obtain salvation and remain faithful). Until we have a working knowledge of these matters, many will find themselves in fellowship with some who are out of fellowship with God and out of fellowship with some who are in fellowship with Him.

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“WILL A MAN ROB GOD?”

MALACHI 3:8

Howell Bigham



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INTRODUCTION

The congregation at Pine Hill Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama, was preparing to sing the final song of the morning service and have closing prayer when a masked gunman came through the door and stole the Sunday morning’s offering (Sherer 1).

In the closing book of the Old Economy, God’s prophet Malachi reported a crime scene in the congregation of God’s people under the Old Testament. In Malachi 3:8-10 he stated:

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it*

One major difference exists between the above historical events. In the first robbery, the masked gunman **took** the Lord’s money. In the second crime, the robbers simply **withheld** their offerings! May we analyze this Old Testament question with the purpose of challenging us to give as God would have us to give. In addition, we will apply this question: “Will a Man Rob God?” to other important areas as well.

WILL A MAN ROB GOD BY FAILING TO GIVE PROPERLY?

A preacher was trying to motivate the congregation. He said, "Brethren, this church has come a long way since we started. When we started, we could barely crawl, but now we can walk." A voice from the back of the building said, "Let it walk, preacher; let it walk!" The preacher was encouraged. "If we commit ourselves, I believe we can run!" he said. The voice said, "Let it run, preacher; let it run!" The preacher got excited. "I even believe that if we put our minds to it, we could *fly* for the Lord! Of course, that would mean we would all need to double our contributions!" The voice from the back said, "Let it walk, preacher; let it walk" (Roper 24).

Many times we do not allow the Scripture's teaching to motivate us to give correctly. In viewing how the Jews gave in the Old Testament, we learn that in addition to the various free-will offerings (Deu. 6:10-11), there were tithes that were required. The first tithe is mentioned in Leviticus 27:30-33. Numbers 18:21-24 informs that this tithe was given to the Levites. The second tithe is found in Deuteronomy 14:22-27. The payment of this tithe involved attendance of at least a week each at the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as a shorter period at the Feast of Weeks (Deu. 16:3, 13, 16). The third tithe referred to in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 was given of the increase at the end of every three years was to be laid up at home and was to be shared by the local Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. Exodus 12:5 informs that the Jews were to give their very best. They were under the requirement to give the first.

We are not commanded to tithe under the New Covenant. However, realizing that we live under a better covenant established upon better promises, would we allow a Jew living under the old law to outgive us? The average church member gives less than three percent of his income to the work of the Lord (Jenkins). When we understand the New Testament's teachings on giving, we will not have a problem giving as we should. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul wrote:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, the apostle Paul penned:

But this *I say*, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may abound to every good work.

Brother Wendell Winkler suggests the following "P's" in giving that will promote growth in giving: (1) Our giving is to be **personal** ("let every one of you," 1 Cor. 16:2). (2) Our giving is to be **periodic** ("Upon the first *day* of the week," 1 Cor. 16:2). (3) Our giving is to be **purposed** ("Every man according as he purposeth in his heart," 2 Cor. 9:7). (4) Our giving is to be **pleasant** ("for God loveth a cheerful giver," 2 Cor. 9:7). (5) Our giving is to be **preferred** (Matt. 6:33). A faithful steward always adjusts his living to his giving, whereas the unfaithful steward will adjust his giving to his living. (6) Our giving is to be **plentiful** ("he which soweth bountifully," 2 Cor. 9:6). (7) According to Luke 6:38, our giving will be **profitable** (49-52). Adding to the ones brother Winkler gave, we find one more "P" which is **proportionate** ("as *God* hath prospered him," 1 Cor. 16:2).

Many excellent examples are found in the New Testament regarding liberal giving. Remember the poor widow with two mites in Mark 12:41-44? What about the marvelous Macedonian brethren in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9? However, the greatest and perfect example of a liberal giver is God. God is a **liberal** giver! James wrote "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1:5). In James 1:17 we read: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." God also is a **loving** giver! The golden text of the Bible declares this! In John 3:16 we learn: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In addition, God is a **loyal** giver! The Psalmist penned: "Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits*, even the God of our salvation" (Psa. 68:19). In the model prayer that our Lord gave in Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord taught the dependability of God's provisions when He said, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mat. 6:11). In seeking to imitate God in the grace of giving, we too must be a liberal, loving, and loyal giver! Below is a

chart that we can use to compare our giving habits with those of the Bible.

Twelve Givers of the Bible

The willing giver. Abraham, who offered his only son. Genesis 22:1-19.

The big little giver. The widow, who in giving two mites, gave all that she had. Mark 12:42-44.

The stingy giver. Saul, who wanted to offer the spoils of the Amalekites. 1 Samuel 15:17-23.

The sacrificial giver. David, who refused to give that which cost him nothing. 2 Samuel 24:24.

The covetous giver. Ananias and Sapphira, who held part back, pretending to give all. Acts 5:1-10.

The consecrated givers. The Macedonians, who first gave of themselves to the Lord. 2 Cor. 8:1-15.

The life givers. Peter and John, who had neither silver or gold but gave their lives. Acts 3:1-10.

The voluntary giver. Zacchaeus, who had given half his goods to feed the poor without being asked. Luke 19:1-19.

The reward givers. Those who gave to be seen of men. They had their only reward. Mat. 6:2.

The unpretentious giver. The Samaritan, who made no show. Luke 10:25-37.

The perfumed givers. The Philippians, whose gifts were "an odor of sweet smell." Phi. 4:17-18.

The greatest giver. God, for "thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." John 3:16.

Selected

WILL A MAN ROB GOD OF HIS TALENTS?

In Matthew 25:14-30 we are presented with the parable of the talents. As most of us know, there were three servants that were given talents according to their several ability. One servant received five talents, another received two, and the third servant received one talent. The five and two talent men worked and doubled their talents. However, the one talent man "went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money" (Mat. 25:18). When the master returned, the five and two talent servants were blessed. The one talent man was condemned for his wickedness and slothfulness (25:26). His master told him that the very least he should have done was to put his lord's money to the exchangers for the purpose of making some interest (25:27). It is tragic that the majority of members of the Lord's church are robbing God of their talents. Every person in the church has at least one talent that he should

be using to the glory of God. Each member plays an essential role in the functioning of the spiritual body (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Let us use our talents in the work of the Lord! Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). In Ephesians 2:10 Paul stated, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

WILL A MAN ROB GOD OF TIME?

Time is such a precious commodity. The value of time is seen in the fact that we have watches, clocks, calendars, and day planners to help us take inventory of our time. However, we are not the ones that introduced the idea of time. *Time*, or a form thereof, is used 543 times in the Old Testament and 206 times in the New Testament. In Ephesians 5:15-16 Paul stresses the importance of using one's time properly. He said, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

We become guilty of robbing God of our time when we refuse to obey the Gospel of Christ. In Acts 24:25 Paul was before Felix. He had "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." The Inspired Volume records Felix saying, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Felix robbed God of his time!

Many members of the church rob God of their time by being negligent in their attendance. The first day of the week belongs to our heavenly Father. When we take His day and use it for our own pleasures, we become guilty of robbing God of our time. Hebrews 10:25 reads, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

WILL A MAN ROB GOD OF HIS FAMILY?

Too many husbands and fathers are robbing God of their families. We rob God of our families when we:

- Fail to lead our family in service to God (Jos. 24:15)
- Use vulgarity (Eph. 4:29)
- View video tapes, movies, etc., that are obscene in sight and sound
- Drink beer, wine, drugs (Pro. 20:1; 2 Cor. 7:1)

- Participate in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

As husbands and fathers, we must make sure that our homes are those that have God and Christ in them (Psa. 127:1; John 2). We must ensure that our homes follow the Bible (2 Pet. 1:3). God must be placed first in whatever we do (Mat. 6:33).

We are in need of mothers like Hannah, who gave her son Samuel to the Lord for as long “as he liveth” (1 Sam. 1:28). We desperately need fathers like Joshua who said, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Jos. 24:15). We are robbing God of one of our greatest resources when we fail to train and guide our children for Him. Solomon said, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Pro. 22:6). In Ephesians 6:4, Paul instructed fathers to “provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” We are to teach our children how to live and not just how to make a living! There is an interesting article that appeared in the bulletin of the North MacArthur Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, about Howard Hughes, titled: “Will Your Faith Be Passed On?”

Hughes’ life started with great potential, but ended in a pitiful condition. This one time wealthiest man in the world died as a spiritually bankrupt individual. He was born in 1906 in Houston, Texas. His mother, Allene, died in 1921. His father was a Harvard-educated attorney and a great inventor. He invented the rotary drill bit and 166 cutting edges. He formed the Hughes Tool Company and later formed the Hughes Aircraft Corporation. Howard, Jr., inherited 75% of the family business, making him an instant billionaire. In the 1960s he sold much of the company and purchased a number of gambling casinos. Writings showed that he engaged in immorality in almost all categories. He died in 1976 from obscurity and isolation, coupled with extreme phobias and drug addiction.

However, there is another part of the story. Hughes came from a deeply religious family of Gospel preachers. Howard’s great-great-grandfather was John Allen Gano. The dining hall at Freed-Hardeman University is named after this pioneer preacher. He was one of the restoration followers and a friend of Barton Stone and Raccoon John Smith. Hughes’ great-grandfather was also a Gospel preacher. His son, W. B. Gano, was also a lawyer and faithful Gospel preacher. His daughter, Allene, married Howard Hughes, Sr., the father of Howard Hughes! It took only a generation to separate Hughes from the religious

identity of the family. The separation cost him his mental, physical, and spiritual well being. Remember the words of 2 Timothy 1:5: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Will you pass on your faith to your children and grandchildren?

WILL A MAN ROB GOD OF HIS INFLUENCE?

We all have influence. Even a baby that is still in his mother's womb has influence! He has influenced the parents to make decisions regarding painting and decorating a room that will be called a nursery. He has influenced his parents to begin thinking about the name that they will choose for him. Everyone has influence! However, as we live our lives, it is sad that some rob God of the influence that they could have on others for good. Jesus, in the Constitution of Christianity, said:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:13-16).

Paul wrote, "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phi. 2:15).

Years ago, as the story goes, a blind man was feeling his way through the dark streets of London late at night. He carried a lighted lamp which could be seen a good distance ahead and behind him. As he walked along, feeling his way with a cane, a woman approached him and gently asked, "Pardon me, sir, why are you carrying a lantern? You cannot even see!" "Oh, I don't carry it for myself, ma'am, it's for others. So they won't stumble over me." One of the great lessons of the New Testament calls on believers to walk carefully, soberly, circumspectly—so they will not cause others to stumble over them (Vaughn). We must guard our influence so we will not be a stumbling block to others but rather a stepping stone.

Influence is so powerful! It does not go to the grave with us when we die. Abel is an example of one who though dead still is influencing man for good (Heb. 11:4). We all know of people who, though they

have kept the appointment of death, are still influencing others for the Lord. When we die, we must leave the light on! There was a mother and her young daughter who were walking past the house in Springfield, Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln once lived. The lights were burning inside, making the house seem warm and inviting. The mother stopped and began to tell her little girl about this great President, and how the nation mourned when he died. The little girl listened attentively and then suddenly exclaimed: "Look Momma. When Mr. Lincoln went away, he left the lights on!" When we are gone, will we leave the lights on? Let us make sure that we leave the Gospel light burning brightly for others to see (*Meads Chapel News*).

How tragic it is for one to lose his influence to teach his own family because he has allowed sin to overtake his life. He has robbed God of lives that otherwise could be won for the Lord!

CONCLUSION

The question that Malachi posed to the children of God under the Old Testament needs to be considered often today. Reflection and self-examination will prevent us from robbing our God of that which belongs to Him. All that we have belongs to God. We are just stewards. Paul said, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Are we faithful to God in our offerings? Are we good stewards when it comes to using our talents for Him? Are we loyal givers of time to God? How are we doing with the treasure of our families? Are we robbing God of our influence?

The thief who took the contribution from the members of the Pine Hill Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama, got away. At least, he believes that he did. One day, the God who knows and sees all, will judge him by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31). If we rob God, there is a price to pay. That price is far too expensive. Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10:

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.

The time we have on this earth is a probationary period. Let us make any corrections that we need to make while we have the time and opportunity to do so. Remember, when we give as God commands, there are blessings in store! Malachi, God's prophet penned: "Prove me

now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it*" (Mal. 3:10). Friend, we cannot afford to give improperly!

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